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THESIS

ESTONIA - PROSPECTS FOR SURVIVAL IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

by
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June 1997

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In many ways, Estonia's 750 years of foreign occupation created an environment in which independence flourishes today. When the opportunity to reassert its independence came, the Estonians were able to rely on a remarkable degree of popular support and unanimity in all major aspects of the process.

In the six years that have passed since independence, the Estonians have established a stable currency and a successful economy. They have established the rule of law and have conducted free and democratic elections. They created a military from scratch, and have formed a multi-national peace-keeping battalion with the other Baltic States which has conducted peace-keeping operations both in Bosnia and in Lebanon.

Estonia's foreign policy priority is gaining admission into the EU and NATO. The debate over Estonian admission into NATO has several implications for U.S. policy. First, there is a large Baltic constituency within the U.S. who were quite active during the Soviet occupation and helped keep Baltic policy on the American foreign policy agenda. Secondly, Estonian membership in NATO is important because the U.S. supports the inclusion of Central and East European nations into the alliance. Finally, the decision of whether or not to offer Estonia membership is likely to have a effect U.S./Russian relations. Russia has publicly stated on many occasions that they do not support any of the Baltic nations joining NATO.

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The University of Chicago Press is pleased to announce the publication of the first volume of the new series, "The History of the United States," by the late Professor [Name], who was a member of the faculty of the University of Chicago for many years. The book is a comprehensive history of the United States, covering the period from the early years of the Republic to the present. It is written in a clear and concise style, and is suitable for both students and general readers. The book is available in paperback and hardcover formats. The price of the paperback is \$14.95, and the price of the hardcover is \$24.95. The book is available at the University of Chicago Press, 505 East Superior Street, Chicago, Illinois 60605. For more information, please contact the University of Chicago Press at (312) 937-1234.

I. INTRODUCTION

Malbone W. Graham, the author of New Governments of Eastern Europe, once wrote that the independence of Estonia “was not brought about without hardship, and the course which the Estonian nation was compelled to follow in achieving it led a gallant people almost to martyrdom.”¹ While this is certainly a true statement that accurately depicts the events of the 1970’s and 1980’s in Estonia, this amazing statement was not written during the post Cold War era but in 1927. While Graham had little idea that Estonia would soon lose its independence and suffer under Soviet occupation for the next fifty years, his statement is equally true today, seventy years later.

This thesis will address the question: what are Estonia’s prospects for survival in the twenty-first century? It will examine Estonia as a nation and its history. This examination will enable the reader to understand what Estonian nationhood and citizenship have meant throughout the ages; often a serf, sometimes a slave, almost continuously the native in an occupied land, but above all else, always proud. By examining Estonia’s history, one learns the answers to many of the important questions of the moment. Why is Estonia different from the other republics of the former Soviet Union? How was Estonia able to maintain its unique language and culture in spite of more than 700 years of foreign occupation? Why was Estonia’s economy so weak when it achieved its independence? Why does the idea of a resurgent or nationalistic Russia concern Estonia? It is vital to

¹ Graham, page 246

understand the answers to these questions if one is to understand the essence of Estonian identity.

This thesis will argue that, following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the declaration of Estonian independence, the Estonians faced serious security dilemmas. Throughout its history, Estonia has been Europe's victim as invading armies crossed it from east to west and west to east. In August 1991, the country faced threats to its national security from many directions. After forty years of Soviet mismanagement, the country's economy had been run into the ground. If Estonia was to survive as a state, it would have to depend on aid from the West (at least initially) and convince the population to endure the economic hardships as the nation transitioned to a market economy. Without a stable economy, Estonia could not expect internal stability.

At the time of independence, Estonia viewed the Soviet Union as a serious threat. The Soviet army had garrisoned approximately 130,000 troops in Estonia during the Cold War at more than 500 bases² and arranging for the withdrawal of those troops with Moscow was troublesome at best.³ Russia also claimed interests in Estonia's internal affairs as a result of the large number of Russian military retirees residing in the country. Additionally, the collapse of the Soviet Union's empire greatly disturbed many Russian communists and nationalists. These Russian nationalists spoke with harsh rhetoric when they discussed the "Estonian problem," and Estonia had little choice but to listen to this rhetoric and treat the threats they were making as real.

² Corley, page 107

³ Smith, M., page 29

Unlike the other nations destined to later join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Estonia refused any equipment from the former Soviet military. This policy forced the country to create its military capability (equipment, soldiers, doctrine, and organization) from scratch. This assignment was not only a difficult task, but also an expensive one which only added to Estonia's other financial difficulties.

The government of Estonia realized that its population was too small (approximately 1.4 million) to support large standing armies (nor could the economy afford it). They also recognized that they would be incapable of independently protecting their borders without foreign assistance. As a result, Estonia decided quickly that the best way to assure their independence and to provide for their security was a two pronged method -- continuing efforts to bolster national military capability and integrating into Western security organizations. They hope this assistance will come primarily from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but they also hope to become full members of WEU and other European organizations.

Estonia seeks to enhance its security through several foreign relations initiatives. The first, as was mentioned previously, includes strengthening ties to the West. The second includes normalizing relations with Russia (its largest perceived threat) to include resolution on controversial topics such as border issues, minority rights, and Russia's objection to Estonia's inclusion into NATO. Estonia also hopes to increase regional cooperation by participation in Nordic organizations and improved ties with the Scandinavian countries.

Some observers of foreign affairs may ask why this issue is relevant. Estonia is a very small country with a similarly small population, economy, and military. While these facts are undeniable, they do not paint the entire picture. On November 20, 1995, then U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry stated that “Estonia’s security is important to the United States. Indeed, the security and stability in Estonia affect the security and stability of all of Europe.”⁴

The following year, the United States Ambassador to Estonia, Ambassador Lawrence P. Taylor, elaborated on American interests in Estonia. He explained the “very special relationship” the United States has with the Baltic States and acknowledged that the Baltic States play a “special role” within American foreign policy, “a role that is qualitatively larger and more important than one might believe, looking at the size of the Baltic States.” Ambassador Taylor cited two reasons why this was true. “One of the main reasons is that the Baltic States, although they are small, are important. They’re on the front lines in a sense....The history and geography of the Baltic States give them an importance beyond their size.” The second reason Taylor cited was the fact that they are not just a foreign issue, but a domestic one.

Most foreign policies have a domestic root in interests or groups... In the case of the Baltic States, there are very important communities of American citizens who came from or whose parents or grandparents came from the Baltic States....These communities remained active within the United States, always keeping alive the concept, the hope, the inspiration that one day the Baltic States would be free and independent again.⁵

⁴ Perry, November 20, 1995

⁵ Taylor, December 9, 1996

It is quite likely that the same Baltic Americans that helped influence U.S. policy on the Baltics during Soviet occupation will continue to exert influence over U.S. legislators as they debate important issues such as Estonian membership in NATO.

Finally, while it is certainly appropriate to conduct a survey of Estonia as it prepares for possible admission into NATO and the European Union, it is also useful because the national security environment in which Estonia finds itself is not unique. Many small nations today face security challenges not unlike Estonia's. Similarly, Estonia has served as a buffer along Russia's western borders for centuries. Such has often been the role of small countries throughout history. Belgium forms an outstanding example of such a country. An analysis of Estonia, its threats, its potential, and its future, can teach us much that can be applied to other areas in the present and in the future.

II. HISTORY OF ESTONIA

A. BACKGROUND

Many westerners wrongly consider that the independence movements in the Baltic States circa 1990 were a newly discovered form of Baltic nationalism. In reality however, nationalist sentiment in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, remained beneath the surface, regardless of Soviet efforts to crush it. These three republics formed a “distinct and unique cultural unit - a Western enclave within the multi-national Soviet state.”⁶ This fact was due partly to the fact that the Baltic republics were the only areas of the Soviet Union to experience independence in the modern era.

Many wrongly consider the three Baltic States as one geopolitical entity, but this idea is misleading. The Baltic people are diverse both ethnically and culturally. Estonians speak a Finno-Ugrian language which is similar to Finnish, but very different from that of their neighbors to the south. The Latvians and the Lithuanians speak the only remaining varieties of the Indo-European Baltic family of languages.

The religions practiced by these states differ also, but along a different split than languages. The development of Estonia and Latvia was closely tied to that of Germany, and therefore, developed within the North European Protestant world. The history of the Lithuanians on the other hand, was closely tied to Poland, and as a result, developed with the Central and Eastern European Catholic Church. It is only due to the shared experiences of the twentieth century (their struggle for independence, brief period of

⁶ Misiunas and Taagepera, page 1

independence, experiences of the Second World War, and Soviet occupation of the Cold War years) that these three countries are now commonly grouped together as a single entity.⁷

B. UNTIL 1914

The origins of Estonian nationality date back approximately 5,000 years. They pride themselves on being “the world’s smallest continental nation-state with its own distinct language and a fully developed modern culture based on this language.”⁸ Although this assertion is true, the Estonians spent most of the dark ages and the early middle ages farming their land and living in small villages. Cities were almost nonexistent, although small communities did develop along the Baltic coast as trade with the Vikings expanded. These small villages were ruled by the elders, and they practiced a religion of pagan origins. The Estonians had little contact with the outside world until around the year 1200 AD. By this time, “the Estonians and Latvians acquired an unenviable geopolitical and geodemographic position that has bedeviled them ever since.”⁹ The climate and land were such that Estonia could not maintain a large population, and therefore exert a large amount of self-determination against those who would impose their will on them.

⁷ This is a difficult tightrope to walk. Estonia as an example tries to enhance unity and cooperation within the Baltic States while at the same time protecting its own self interests. Because Latvia and Lithuania lag behind Estonia in terms of economic and military reform, Estonia fears being dragged down by their Baltic partners when it comes to acceptance into an expanded European Union or NATO. On February 4, 1997, the Estonian Foreign Minister, Toomas Hendrik Ilves made the following statement while addressing an audience in London: “Each country must be evaluated individually, not as a geographical bloc. None of the applicant countries undertook free-market democratic reform as a bloc, nor will those countries function within the European Union as blocs.”

⁸ Taagepera, page 4

⁹ *ibid.*, page 18

Unfortunately, the central location of Estonia made it impossible for it to be ignored (much as Finland has been through most of its history). The ill fate of geographic reality had placed Estonia between the east and the west, and in a position that blocked much of Russia's access to the Baltic Sea.

The first period of foreign domination began with a German and Danish invasion of the Baltic regions, then known as Livland and Estland, in 1201. The Estonians resisted until 1227, but ultimately could not prevent the invasion. This marked the beginning of German rule which would last from 1227 until 1561. One lasting result of the German era was the establishment of Baltic-German aristocracy that would remain until the twentieth century.

The era of German rule was followed by a much shorter period of Swedish rule (1561-1710). These years are sometimes referred to by the Estonians as the "good old Swedish times,"¹⁰ however, this slogan only appears to be true in comparison to the war, famine, and plague, that haunted Estonia before and after the Swedes. The Germans brought feudalism to Estonia and turned the peasants into serfs, but the Swedes, at least to a small extent, emancipated the serfs around 1681. The University of Tartu, a school which still plays a vital role in modern Estonian society, was founded in 1632.

The Swedish and the Russians fought the Great Northern War from 1700-1721. This war resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Nystad in 1721 formalizing the absorption of the Baltic regions into the Russian Empire, and "confirming the privileged position of the Baltic Germans and the Lutheran Church in the Baltic provinces."¹¹ This privileged

¹⁰ Taagepera, page 23

¹¹ Hiden and Salmon, page 12

status of the Baltic Germans was confirmed by each tsar until Alexander II in 1856. At this point, Baltic German control diminished due to Russification policies, but they did not lose control completely until the Baltic States gained independence following the First World War.

The entry into Russian rule was a dark period for the Estonians. By 1690, the Estonian population had reached 350,000 to 400,000, but between the famine of 1695 and 1697, and the Great Northern War, the population of Estonia had dropped to 150,000 in 1721. Additionally, the Russians began deporting native Estonians, developing a pattern that they would follow for much of the next 250 years. “The entire burgher population of Tartu was deported to Vologda and Kostroma in northern Russia...”¹² In 1708, a native Estonian named Käsü Hans wrote a poem of this period which was first printed in 1902:

*Then to Russia he did take
All the cityfolks, by force.
All the masters, mistresses
Sorrowfully shed their tears:
Into Russia I will be.
Tartu city, woe to me*

Although the Swedes had largely eliminated serfdom, the Russians reimplemented it, and as the native population lost their freedom, the autonomy of the Baltic Germans expanded. By western standards, the education level of the Baltic Germans was average, but it was exceptional by Russian standards. This, in combination with the proximity to the newly relocated Russian capital in St. Petersburg, created the conditions whereupon,

¹² Taagepera, page 26

“for two centuries, the Baltic Germans became a major pool for Russian officials, generals, and ministers.”¹³

The rise of the power of the Baltic Germans was inversely proportional to the rights and freedom of the Estonian serfs who at this point were bought and sold in markets or traded for other commodities. Beginning in 1804, some of this began to change. Tsar Alexander approved some limited agrarian reform, and changes made between 1816 and 1819 “gave the peasants their personal freedom, and allowed them to settle anywhere in the province -- providing the landowner had no objection.”¹⁴

The period from the 1860’s through 1885 is commonly referred to as the Era of Awakening. Land reforms ensured that more peasants bought farms. The industrial revolution gradually began to enter Estonia, and the first railway between Tallinn and St. Petersburg opened in 1870. Estonian language journalism began in 1857, and slowly an Estonian intelligentsia developed. Between 1864 and 1880, the nationalist movement published its first newspaper, the *Eesti Postimees* (The Estonian Postman). Within just thirty years, Estonia had “evolved into a nation with newspapers, theater, poetry, and mass cultural events, expressing themselves in a rapidly modernizing language and sustained by a vigorous farm economy”¹⁵

Estonians became aware that they constituted a nationality and formulated their demands. A moderate group of the national movement emphasized the development of the spirit and culture. The more radical group stressed economic progress, the increase of the role of the peasants in society, and the removal of the privileges of the aristocracy and clergy.¹⁶

¹³ Taagepera, page 27

¹⁴ White, page 15

¹⁵ Taagepera, page 31

¹⁶ Jõeeste, page 6

The German unification in 1871 increased Russian fears that the Baltic peasants may become Germanized, inviting expansion by Germany. A popular Russian slavophile of the time named Iurii Samarin stated that it was time for the Baltic provinces to stop trying to isolate themselves from Russia and “to be convinced at last that ... they are not an advance post of Germany ... but a western, maritime borderland of Russia.” This initiated the period of Russification which lasted roughly from 1885 until 1917.

Administrative power was taken away from the Baltic Germans and given to Russians. All educational instruction shifted to the Russian language. One of the results was that Tartu University changed from being a German-language school to a Russian one (not just in language, but also in faculty and student body). Although these linguistic restrictions were difficult on the Estonians, it was worse on the Baltic Germans, because they had more to lose. “The number of Estonian students at Tartu University was growing, economic development continued, and the sense of national identity was only reinforced by this new onslaught.”¹⁷

Another effect of the Russification efforts was the weakening of Baltic German “cultural hegemony”¹⁸ over Estonia. The Estonians gained greater exposure to Russian and Western culture through cosmopolitan St. Petersburg. “The seemingly contradictory effect of Russification was not to denationalize Estonian intellectuals, but rather to liberate them from the Baltic German cultural world.”¹⁹ In 1894, a new tsar came to power in

¹⁷Jõeste, page 34

¹⁸ Taagepera, 34

¹⁹ Raun, page 77

Russia who was less concerned about the influence or threat from the Baltic Germans. From this point forward, Russia eased its efforts at Russification.

The days of the Baltic German aristocracy were rapidly coming to an end. As more and more of them moved to Russia to seek leadership positions, their replacements could only come from two sources. The first was a continuous flow of German immigrants into Estonia. The second was the Germanization of Estonian people. However, the policies of Russification had drastically limited the number of German immigrants allowed to enter Estonia. Additionally, the increasingly nationalistic mood among the Estonians made their “Germanization” less likely. Finally, many young Baltic Germans could foresee that they had little future in the Baltics and emigrated either to Russia or back to Germany. By 1900, they made up less than four percent of the population and that percentage was falling.

As the industrial revolution and increasing urbanization unfolded in Estonia after 1860, more and more Estonians moved into the cities, altering their demographics. The textile mills of Narva were among the world’s largest, and in the 1880’s, Tallinn was the second-largest import center in Russia, surpassed only by St. Petersburg. Gradually, Estonians became the predominate inhabitants in the cities, previously dominated by Russians and Baltic Germans. By 1900, they began to replace the Germans in critical city leadership positions. “By the early twentieth century, Baltic nationalism, although not directly threatening the Russian state, was perceived by the tsarist regime as more dangerous than the traditional particularist claims of the German ascendancy.”²⁰ Development began in the metal and machinery industries, and cotton and wood

processing industries were established. By 1897, the population had grown to 986,000 people, of which, slightly more than 90% were Estonian. The literacy rate was more than 75%, a rate that exceeded even France.

“The revolutionary year of 1905 revealed the full force of discontent among the peoples of the Baltic lands.”²¹ Urban unrest was particularly severe in Tallinn. In October 1905, strikes in Russia spread into the Baltic countryside. The German nobles became the target of most of the aggression, and 120 German manor houses were burned to the ground. On October 16, the Russian army counter-attacked killing 94 of the strikers.²² The Estonians elected an All-Estonian Congress of People’s Representatives in November 1905. The Congress split into radical and reformist halves, and although the congress was of little consequence, it was the birth of Estonian political parties.

During November and December 1905, the Russian army came to the aid of the beleaguered Baltic Germans. “The Baltic German press encouraged Russian military intervention by asserting that the Latvians and Estonians intended to establish independent republics.”²³ The punitive actions by the military and the Russian government during the next few years were brutal. In Estonia, more than 300 people were condemned to death, and, including the Latvians, more than 8,000 were imprisoned or exiled to Siberia.²⁴

²⁰ Hiden and Salmon, page 19

²¹ *ibid.*, page 21

²² Jõeste, page 5

²³ White, page 31

²⁴ *ibid.*, page 31

C. WORLD WAR I AND THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

“For the peoples on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, World War I began as a Russian-German war and ended as a war of independence.”²⁵ At the outbreak of the war, most Estonians openly sided with the Russians since they had always considered the Germans an ally of their Baltic German aristocracy. More than 100,000 men (20% of the male population) were mobilized into the tsarist armed forces, and more than 10,000 died during the war.²⁶

When the Russian Revolution toppled the tsar in February 1917, the Estonians quickly took advantage of the opportunity. Approximately 40,000 Estonians demonstrated in St. Petersburg, and the Russian provisional government gave in, granting Estonia autonomy on March 30.²⁷ Almost immediately, the Estonians elected the Land Council as the people’s representative. New parties were formed and national army units were created.

Peace talks between the Germans and the Russians broke down in February 1918, and Russian forces fled back to Russia in the face of the advancing German army. The Land Council formed the Estonian Salvation Committee, who in turn, declared Estonia an independent state on February 24, 1918, in the Estonian Independence Manifesto. The Germans refused to recognize the new state and occupied Tallinn the following day, disbanding the Land Council, the Salvation Committee and the national military units.

²⁵ Taagepera, page 41

²⁶ *ibid.*, page 36

²⁷ Jõeste, page 6

“The surrender of Germany to the Western Allies (November 11, 1918) altered the picture almost overnight.”²⁸ Lenin’s Bolsheviks were surprised by the sudden German collapse and were slow to concentrate enough troops to reinvade Estonia and reestablish control over the former republic. The terms of Germany’s surrender to the Western Allies mandated that the German army withdraw from the Baltic States, but they were also obligated to resist advances by the Bolsheviks. “The first Bolshevik attack at the Estonian-Russian border (Narva, November 22, 1918) was repelled by the German troops, but after they withdrew, the Bolsheviks took Narva and proclaimed an Estonian Workers Commune (November 29, 1918).”²⁹ The Estonian War of Independence had begun.

Some Estonians sided with the Bolsheviks, and the Russians tried to portray the fight as a civil war, but it was clear to all observers that the conflict was an Estonian-Russian one. The Estonians had some poorly trained and equipped military units, but they could not defend successfully against the advancing Russians, and by the end of December 1918, two-thirds of Estonia was under Russian control.

In January 1918, everything turned around. Within a month, almost all of the Estonia territory was recovered. This was the result of many different factors. Military and civilian structures in Tallinn finally became sufficiently organized. Finland provided crucial financial support that allowed Estonia to establish its own currency. A former Estonian leader named Konstantin Päts was released from a German concentration camp, and assumed premiership. A high ranking Estonian serving in the Russian army returned to Estonia to offer his assistance. The shortness of lines made it easier for the Estonians

²⁸ Taagepera, page 44

to reinforce and to supply their troops. The Finnish sent some volunteers which boosted morale, and the British sent a naval squadron to block a Russian attempt to land behind Estonian lines.

Despite these advances, the war continued for another year. In April 1919, the people freely elected the Estonian Constituent Assembly, and on May 19 that year, they issued the “Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Estonia,” reaffirming the declaration made in February the year before. When the battle reached Estonia’s historic and ethnic borders, Russia and Estonia concluded an armistice (December 31, 1919). A little more than one month later, they signed the Tartu Peace Treaty (February 2, 1920) acknowledging the Republic of Estonia’s independence and recognizing its common borders. Within the next few months, Russia concluded similar treaties with Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland. The war was over and Estonia had gained its independence. “Estonia was not created by the Peace Treaty of Versailles; it was created by its war of independence and by whatever it took to bring that war to a successful end, including the Tartu treaty.”³⁰

D. YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

As was the western political current of the time, Estonia adopted a liberal democratic constitution with a single chamber parliament (Riigikogu) and the prime minister serving as head of state. The newly formed state was faced with several critical challenges. The economy was still largely agrarian and land reform was considered the

²⁹ Taagepera, page 44

³⁰ *ibid.*, page 49

most urgent issue. Trade with Russia fell off drastically, so developing new markets was another critical area. Estonia was also left with several important minority populations, the Baltic Germans and the Russians; successful ethnic relations with these two groups was critical to the fledgling country's prospects for future peace and stability.

Land reform occurred quickly, transforming the large estates of the Baltic Germans into smaller farms, but industrial reform was more difficult. Most of the industrial capacity had been either focused on producing Russian military products, or goods for the Russian market. As this market dried up, the Estonians found themselves having to shift production into new industries. Initially, the government created a currency based on the Finnish model (marks and pennies), but this currency experienced severe inflation. In 1928, they switched to the kroon (kroon and sent) which remained relatively stable at a quarter of a U.S. dollar. Resolving the ethnic issues was marginally successful. At this point, the main minorities consisted of Russians (8%), Germans (1.5%), Jews (.5%), and Swedes (.5%).³¹ Although the Estonians attempted to increase minority participation in government by introducing proportional representation, the reality was that they were well represented in economic areas, but poorly represented in both the military and the government.

The Entente powers recognized the Republic of Estonia in January 1921, and in September, it was accepted into the League of Nations. Its initial foreign policy goal was to establish a Regional Baltic League from Finland to Poland, but border disputes between Poland and Lithuania made this impossible. In 1923, they formed the Estonian-Latvian League (they did not include Lithuania because neither nation wanted to get involved in

the dispute with Poland). As relations with Russia slowly improved, a mutual non-aggression pact was signed in 1932 and then renewed in 1934. By this time, the Polish-Lithuanian border disputes had been resolved and a cooperation treaty was signed between the three Baltic States.

In 1935, Estonia's position in the international community was altered. That year, the British concluded a maritime treaty with Germany effectively granting the Baltic Sea into the German sphere of influence. This isolated Estonia geopolitically from the west, and they found themselves caught between a totalitarian Germany in the west, and a totalitarian USSR to the east. Sensing its vulnerable position, Estonia declared itself as a neutral state in December 1938.³²

The Estonians were justified in their fears. On August 23, 1939, just eight months later, the Germans and the Russians signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (MRP). This pact would condemn the Baltics to Soviet domination for the next 50 years. The critical component of this agreement was a secret protocol stating that: "In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR."³³

E. SOVIET OCCUPATION

Following the German invasion of Poland, the Russian Foreign Minister Molotov told the Estonian Foreign Minister Kaarel Selter that Estonia was incapable of defending

³¹ Taagepera, page 51

³² Misiunas and Taagepera, page 14

its neutrality. He cited a few examples, and after several meetings, strong-armed the Estonian government into signing a treaty on September 28, that would allow the Soviets to station 25,000 Red troops on Estonian soil for the duration of the war. The Soviets in return promised they would not infringe upon Estonian sovereignty or impose communism on the Estonian people.³⁴ Almost immediately, the Baltic Germans began returning to Germany, and by May 1941, more than 20,000 had left Estonia. After more than 750 years, the Germans ceased to exist as an element of Estonian society - at least for a month!

On June 16, 1940, the Soviets violated the agreements they had made in September 1939. They demanded that Estonia hold new elections and allow more Soviet troops into the country. Refusing to do so only prompted the Soviet invasion the following day. Estonia was occupied. New elections were held on July 14-15, but many election laws were broken, opposition candidates were removed from ballots, and an environment of fear pervaded the process. Within just a few days, the newly elected parliament proclaimed the creation of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR)(July 21, 1940), and on August 6, the ESSR was incorporated into the Soviet Union. As if loosing their independence was not bad enough, the Soviets proclaimed over the next 50 years that everything had been done as a result of Estonian will. Many years later, an Estonian poet named Hando Runnel wrote a short poem remembering the events of that June.

*Tell me 'bout the sun,
Tell me 'bout the moon.
Tell me 'bout my home,
Tell about that June,*

³³ Sontag and Beddie, page 76

³⁴ Kirby, page 73

*About which stupid
Legend travels wide,
As if our death
Had been a suicide.*

The first year of Soviet occupation devastated Estonia. The economy was centralized and became dependent on Moscow. Chronic shortages arrived as the Soviet army emptied the stores of all of their goods. Bookstores were ordered to tear pages out of books which were deemed unsuitable, and publishing houses were consolidated into one State Publishing House. At Tartu University, more than 70,000 books were destroyed. Church holidays were abolished and community organizations were disbanded.

One of the worst results of the Red Terror though, was the deportations that ensued. During the first year, from July 1940 until June 1941, slightly more than 1,000 people were arrested and disappeared. However, on June 14, 1941, the Soviets began indiscriminate mass terror. That evening alone, 6,640 people were deported (the men to slave labor camps in Siberia, and the women and children to collective farms in Siberia). Another 33,000 men were involuntarily conscripted into the Soviet army and later sent to perish in labor camps. In total, the combined losses reached 60,000 in a single year (six percent of the population).

The Germans invaded Estonia two weeks later, on July 5, 1941, and captured Tallinn from the retreating Soviets by August 28. The situation in Estonia under German occupation can only be described as “better” when one compares it to the deplorable state of affairs under the Soviet occupation. Nationalized property was not returned. The Germans did not recognize the Republic of Estonia, instead, they became part of Ostland,

a province of the Reich. Approximately 5,500 people were sent to German concentration camps and executed. Yet despite all of this, the Germans convinced the Estonians to form military units under German supervision to fight the Soviets. The Estonians realized that the formation of military units might be useful not only in the fight against the Soviets, but possibly against the Germans later. Approximately 40,000 Estonians joined these units.

“Patriotic resistance to German occupation was made difficult because it could play into the hands of the Soviets.”³⁵ In spite of this, an underground organization was formed in April 1944, called the National Committee of the Republic of Estonia. The Red Army attempted to reconquer Estonia in February 1944, but they were repulsed in Narva by a combination of German and Estonian troops. The Soviets launched their next major attack in southern Estonia. As the Germans withdrew under Soviet pressure, the National Committee saw their chance. On September 18, 1944, they established an Estonian provisional government. Meanwhile, Estonian defense forces fought desperately to stem the Soviet advance. Unfortunately, it was in vain. On September 22, the Soviets entered Tallinn and disbanded the provisional government. The Republic of Estonia had regained its independence for only four days, but the symbolic point to the world was critical. The Soviets had not liberated Estonia from the Germans, but instead, had invaded and occupied the small country.

As the Soviets approached Tallinn in September 1944, more than 60,000 Estonians fled to Germany and Sweden. Shortly after regaining control, the Soviets reimplemented their policies of forced deportations and in the final months of 1944, 30,000 people were sent to labor camps in the Soviet Union. The war had devastated the Estonian population.

By war's end, they had lost approximately 30% of their pre-war population through a combination of deportations, executions, combat deaths, loss of territory and emigration.

As Estonia was being overrun at the end of 1944, and units surrendered, many soldiers (as many as 15,000) fled into the forests and continued guerrilla warfare. This "forest brotherhood" continued to wage their guerrilla war against the Soviets from 1945 - 1952. Although their numbers never reached much more than 15,000, estimates say that as a result of attrition and recruiting efforts, as many as 30,000 Estonians served in the guerrilla movement over the years.

The Soviets tried several methods, both conventional and unconventional to defeat this movement. Efforts directed at the guerrillas seldom had much effect, but when the Soviets targeted the civilian support, the guerrilla movement began to fall apart. Relatives, friends, and supporters of guerrillas were in grave danger from the Soviets, and between 1945 and 1951, more than 124,000 people were deported from Estonia.³⁶ Hando Runnel continued to write his dissident poetry about the tragic events of that era:

*Many men were found, deported
Many men to arms resorted.
Bunkers in the woods were built.
Many mouths were filled with silt.*

The Estonian scholar, author, and politician Rein Taagepera divides the years between 1945 and 1980 into three subperiods: the years of genocide (1945-1953), the years of hope (1954-1968), and the years of suffocation (1968-1980).³⁷ The years of

³⁵ Taagepera, page 70

³⁶ Hiden and Salmon, page 129

³⁷ Taagepera, page 77

genocide were marked by the guerrilla movement previously discussed, collectivization of agriculture, colonization, and a purge of Estonian culture.

The first kolkhoz (collective farm) in Estonia was formed in November 1947, following several years of land redistribution aimed at eliminating the large farms. By the end of 1947, only eight percent of the country's farms had collectivized, and by March 1949, the Communist Party of Estonia (CPE) leader Nikolai Karotamm decided the collectivization process was too slow. Beginning on March 23, 1949, and lasting a few days, the Soviets deported at least 20,000 people (mostly farmers) to work collective farms in Siberia. The remaining farmers quickly decided that they would prefer to collectivize in Estonia rather than be deported to Siberia. By the end of 1949, 80% of private farms had turned into collectives, and by the end of the following year, that number was up to 92%.³⁸

The second aspect of Sovietization during this period was colonization. Large scale industrialization in Estonia had profound effects on the development of the postwar society. Oil shale and oil shale gas production, electric power generation, and the machine industry were all rapidly expanded. This expansion meant an influx of more than 200,000 Soviet workers. In a country with a postwar population of only 850,000, this shifted the demographics of the country drastically within the matter of just a few years.³⁹ The manufacturing industry was initially "developed at the expense of all other sectors of the economy, notably agriculture and housing. The rural economy of course suffered not only

³⁸ Taagepera, page 81

³⁹ In 1945, Estonians made up 94% of the population, but by 1953, that had dropped to 72%. The last number includes 60,000 Russian-Estonians who replaced a similar number of Estonians who had been deported.

from lack of investment but also from the disruption brought about by collectivization. In Estonia agricultural production did not regain the 1938-39 level until the early 1960's."⁴⁰

The purge of Estonian culture was the third aspect of the years of genocide. Initially, the Soviets achieved moderate success in tempting the young and the poor to embrace the virtues of Communism. They offered groups of humble origin opportunities for promotion and positions as key leaders. The poor saw this as the "embodiment of social justice" and the construction of a "truly just and affluent society."⁴¹ The Soviets achieved greater successes in Latvia and Lithuania, but where Estonia fell short in numbers of indigenous communist supporters, they substituted with Russian-Estonians. This minority was more than happy to immigrate to Estonia, not only because the Baltics enjoyed a higher standard of living than the rest of the Soviet Union, but because their bi-lingual skills meant tremendous job opportunities.

The success in promoting an indigenous population of supporters of communism had a significant outcome. No longer was it clearly an issue of democratic (but occupied) Estonia versus communistic Russia; now, more frequently it was viewed as an internal division between communistic and democratic elements within the same Estonian society. This, along with the deportations, was also responsible for the end of the guerrilla war. As more and more indigenous Estonians converted to communism, fewer joined the "forest brotherhood." This shift in national political outlook also made it difficult to know who could be trusted.

⁴⁰ Hiden and Salmon, page 131

⁴¹ Shtromas, page 95

When the armed resistance of the guerrilla movement ended, compliance to Soviet domination became the order of the day; however, everything that communism promised had failed to materialize. "There was now less freedom and more injustice; poverty, instead of disappearing, sharply increased, and because of collectivization of agriculture, became clearly irredeemable for all except a handful of top communist bureaucrats."⁴² There were indications that Estonian communists were having trouble reconciling their hopes for Estonia with their ideological beliefs as early as 1946. In this year, Johannes Vares-Barbarus, the chairman of the Estonian Soviet government committed suicide because of the clear contrast between his expectations for Estonia and the realities of Estonia under Soviet domination. The Soviet Union watched the Estonian communists closely, and in 1950 decided to launch a purge of its indigenous membership. As a result, the leadership of the Estonian party was completely replaced by Russians and Russian-Estonians.

By the first half of the 1950's, there were very few if any Estonians who honestly believed in the ideology of the Soviet Union. "Hence, the enforced situation of total outward compliance had been complemented by an equally total inward dissent. It goes without saying that inward dissent tends to find some forms of expression in social action and thus partially reduces the totality of compliance."⁴³ It was this exact conflict between outward compliance and inward dissent that would characterize the national mood of Estonia until the 1980's when outward dissent became the norm.

⁴² Shtromas, page 98

⁴³ *ibid.*, page 101

Every year since the Estonians had lost their independence in 1939 had been filled with disappointment, loss, and chaos. The guerrilla movement was broken and hopes for relief from the West had been given up. Terror had reached everyone -- the anti-German patriots, the private farmers, the intellectuals, and in the end, even the Estonian communists. By 1953, the Estonian society was numb from it all. Arrests and deportations, hunger and economic ruin, continued, but the people no longer seemed surprised. On December 1, 1953, an Estonian prisoner in an arctic slave labor camp named Norilsk wrote a poem entitled "Portrait of Norilsk" that seemed to embody the mood of his nation at the time:

*Cold. Wind from hills. Barbed wire.
That blooming Soviet land.
We walk an old man's walk -
No room for carefree stride.*

*Stride carefree, hit the wire,
A guard's lead in your chest.
The snow would hide forever
Life like beggar's bag.*

*Cold. Snow. Hills. Barbed wire.
Take these and paint Norilsk,
And drowning in your torment,
Paint it a robe with blood.*

*Composer, turn to notes
The song of lips closed tight -
An ode to fit the graveyard
They call USSR.*

Stalin's death in 1953 had brought some hope that there might be some significant change, but time passed and it did not. Life in the cities improved little, cultural developments were still frozen, and the collective farms were still failing. Soviet control

was gradually accepted, at least externally, as unavoidable. The attitude of most Estonians gradually shifted from working or fighting against foreign occupation to working within an environment of foreign rule.

Against this bleak backdrop some improvements did occur. Large scale immigration of non-Estonians stopped for the moment. Forced labor that had been brought into Estonia departed, and many of the deportees returned home. Because many of these returning deportees moved into the cities, the housing shortages increased, but it was still better to have their citizens home. Power struggles within the Kremlin distracted attention away from the Baltic States, and this gave them slightly improved autonomy. In the summer of 1953, the position of the second secretary of the Communist Party of Estonia (CPE) shifted from a Russian to a Russian-Estonian. Repression forces were reduced causing a drop in the Russian membership of the CPE. Many young Estonians began joining in hope that they may could change the party from within. As a result, the CPE became more Estonian in composition.

Changes were made in the economy and agriculture also. Regional economic councils were established in 1957. These represented a further increase in Estonian autonomy. Economic planning and control of local industry was shifted to the ministries of the various republics. A byproduct of this reorganization was that many incompetent Russians were replaced by capable Estonians. Compulsory product deliveries were abolished, and as production rose, the life of the rural farmer improved.

Although still clearly dominated by the Soviet Union, the ESSR administration sought some symbolic legitimacy. In 1957, Estonian athletes began wearing uniforms

bearing Estonia instead of Estonian SSR, and the first post-war Baltic soccer games were held in 1958. Restraints on cultural products also loosened. “Those who compared the foul air of 1959 to the suffocation of 1953 saw the immense difference between cultural survival and death. There was new hope, and the coming decade was to see a veritable resurrection of Baltic cultures. The fact that it did not come about easily only added to its significance.”⁴⁴

Although Estonia still lacked political autonomy, by 1960 they were achieving a greater extent of cultural autonomy. The reemergence was first visible in poetry, but was soon expanded to include short stories, novels and theater. Estonian classics were republished, and such authors as Franz Kafka and Fyodor Dostoyevski, still forbidden in the Soviet Union, were published in Estonia. The first Soviet Jazz Festival was held in Tartu in 1964. Contacts with the West also began to increase. Small numbers of foreign travelers were allowed to visit, including some Estonian refugees holding Western passports. A select few Estonians were even allowed to travel to the West. Finnish television was now able to be viewed from Estonia and this gave increasing visions of what life outside the Soviet Union was like. “Estonia had the best conditions in the entire USSR -- and yet the conditions continued to be utterly miserable when compared with those of Western neighbors that Estonia had been catching up with during independence.”⁴⁵

Two areas remained great challenges for the Estonians. The first was the Soviet disregard for the environment, and the second was a resurgence of Russification practices.

⁴⁴ Misiunas and Taagepera, page 150

⁴⁵ Taagepera, page 95

Estonian jobs were often better advertised in St. Petersburg or in Moscow than in Estonia itself, and immigration began to increase again in the 1960's. Soviet immigrants often (if not always) received housing for which Estonians had been waiting for years. They made no attempts to learn the Estonian language or to assimilate in any manner. The Soviets considered themselves superior in all ways, even when the immigrant was just an unskilled laborer. These factors obviously did not help already strained relations.

The Nazi plans for the Baltics following World War II had called for their colonization by 520,000 Germans. By 1965, the Baltics had received more than one million Russians. Stalin and his successors had colonized the Baltic States far more dramatically than Hitler had ever imagined. The Estonian percentage of the population had peaked in 1959 at 74%, but by 1970, had fallen back down to 68%.

While the policies of Russification continued, many Estonians still held hope that things might get better. In August 1968, following the Soviet aggression in Czechoslovakia, any hope was lost. Rein Taagepera refers to this period (1968-1980) as the years of suffocation

because of the almost painlessly slow but relentless squeeze on the national psyche through colonization and infringement of the Russian language on ever-new aspects of social life. At the same time, direct contacts with the West expanded, and in its shrinking range, Estonian culture and lifestyle continued to develop in a Western direction.⁴⁶

The years of 1968-1975 were a period of high consumerism. Material goods were now becoming more accessible and status symbols shifted from power to "conspicuous consumption." Car sales in Estonia increased five-fold between 1971 and 1972. Numerous sorts of consumer goods saturated the market from washing machines to

cassette recorders. Television (always a popular consumer good) also had a social effect on the population. Approximately 75% of television broadcasting was in the Russian language, and therefore tended to have a Russifying effect on the Estonians. In northern Estonia, this was effectively countered by Finnish broadcasting. Western cultural influence continued to expand during this period and long hair and leather jackets became the fashion of the day. Estonia's first comic book was a translation of Donald Duck from Finnish. A byproduct of this consumerism was that it weakened the ideological underpinnings of the communist ideals.

During these years, politics in Estonia and Russia stagnated. While it is true that the Russians trusted key leadership positions to Russian-Estonians, they were not given to Estonians. Slowly the pool of Russian-Estonians began to decrease through a combination of their own mortality and their reintegration into Estonian society, and as fewer Russian-Estonian replacements were available, key leaders held positions for extremely long periods further deepening the aura of a gerontocracy. In the mid 1970's, Estonians had hoped that their countryman, Vaino Väljas would become the next CPE first secretary. They were disappointed, but not surprised, when this position went to a Russian-Estonian named Karl Vaino.

Beginning in October 1978, the Soviet Union began another Russification campaign. All nursery schools were required to use Russian for at least half of the day, and language instruction was moved up from the third to the first grade for schoolchildren. Vaino declared that Russian was the *lingua franca* in Estonia. As was becoming more

⁴⁶ Taagepera, page 97

and more frequent, the Estonians rebelled against the attempts to dissolve their culture. In a 1979 survey, the percentage of Estonians claiming fluency in Russian actually dropped from 29% to 24%. All other republics reported increases. One of the reasons for Estonian unwillingness to learn Russian was a fear that publications in Estonian would cease.

Spontaneous and unorganized dissent was almost always present, but in the 1970's it increased. Estonians often refused to answer when addressed in Russian, and when the Czech hockey team defeated the Soviet Union in April 1972, Estonian university students celebrated in the streets shouting "We won! We won!," making the connection with the aggression in Czechoslovakia just four years earlier. In December 1976, a pop concert was prohibited at Tartu University and a thousand students poured into the streets shouting anti-Soviet slogans.⁴⁷

F. THE RISE OF DISSENT AND THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

The first truly organized and well publicized Estonian dissent began in October 1972. The Estonian National Movement and the Estonian Democratic Movement co-wrote a memorandum to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim, describing the conditions within the ESSR and the Soviet Russification practices. It also demanded the restoration of the independent Republic of Estonia through United Nations supervised open elections.

⁴⁷ Taagepera, page 101

The United Nations did not act on this memorandum, but the Soviet Union did. Four Estonian engineers were arrested and received sentences ranging from five to six years. This was a sign of changing times within the Soviet Union. During Khrushchev's rule, Mart Niklus received a ten year sentence for simply smuggling out photographs of the Estonian conditions, and during the Stalin years, most punishments ranged from 25 years to death. The Soviet Union no longer had the stomach nor the inclination to handle dissent as powerfully as it had in the past. This helped provide the encouragement needed to bolster opposition in the Baltic States.

Dissent increased throughout the 1970's with good reason. Soviet immigration continued, although at a slower rate due to declining Russian birthrates. Housing shortages were now so critical in the cities that divorced couples were still required to live in the same apartment, sometimes even after remarrying. Many children were forced to attend school at night because of overcrowding, and the consumerism of the early 1970's dried up. By the middle to the end of the decade, not only were consumer goods hard to come by, but basic food items such as meat, coffee, or potatoes were equally rare. At this point, 62% of the average Estonian household income was spent on food. Alcohol consumption was 50% higher than in either the United States or the Soviet Union.

The environment was also severely damaged during this period. Estonian ecological concerns began in 1965 about pesticides such as DDT, but increased into the 1970's as oil-shale and phosphate industries became more concerned with production requirements than environmental protection. At this same time, the fresh water fish catch decreased by a factor of eight.

One of the first examples of unified and organized dissent among the people of all three Baltic States occurred in 1979 on the fortieth anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This was the Baltic Charter (which was signed by 37 Lithuanians, four Latvians, and four Estonians) demanded the nullification of the secret protocols condemning the Baltics to the Soviet sphere of influence. Although this document made little impact at the time, it laid the foundation for inter-Baltic cooperation and ten years later, their goal actually became a reality.

Between the years of 1980 and 1987, Estonian dissent took many forms. On March 27, 1981, an Estonian dissident named Jüri Kukk died under mysterious circumstances in a Russian prison. He became the unofficial martyr of the dissident movement.

In 1981, all three Baltic States submitted a letter to the Russian government proposing that the Baltics be made a nuclear-free zone. At first this might seem unrealistic, but at this same time, the Soviet Union was asking NATO to declare the neutral countries, Sweden and Finland, and two NATO countries, Denmark and Norway, nuclear-free without offering any Warsaw Pact nations in return. The Baltic proposal would have added validity to the Soviet's requests.

Also in 1981, the Democratic Peoples Front of the Soviet Union (centered in Estonia) proposed "silent half hours." These were short periods of time when people would go to their offices but simply refuse to do any work. They were to begin on December 1, 1981, and continue on the first day of each month, but the Soviet crackdown on the Polish Solidarity Movement in December 1981, had a chilling effect on the plan.

After a few months, it fizzled out, but only after approximately 150 people had been arrested for participating in these events.

The last known arrest of an Estonian dissident happened in 1985, the year Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in Moscow. In 1987, things began to change. Many of the jailed dissidents were released from prisons and allowed to return to Estonia. The Soviet authorities declared that they had discovered “procedural errors,” but it was clear that the Soviet Union was losing its willingness to aggressively put down dissent. These changes caused the underground movements to come out into the open. Dissent had reached a point where “it was becoming accepted by the authorities, though not formally legalized.”⁴⁸

The years 1982 and 1983 also saw an improvement in Estonia’s political situation. In 1982, Arnole Rüütel became the ESSR chairman. In 1983, Bruno Saul became the ESSR premier. Both of these men were native Estonians, and as such, Estonians now occupied two of the three most important posts in the ESSR, positions which had been dominated by Russian-Estonians since the 1950’s.

One of the industries that Estonia developed at the beginning of its independence was small-scale phosphorite mining to make fertilizers. In the 1960’s, the Soviets introduced open-pit mining and expanded production. The phosphorite that was being mined lay beneath a layer of oil shale. The problem was that as this oil shale was exposed to air, it began to burn. The Soviets recklessly continued these mining procedures while

⁴⁸ Taagepera, page 118

oil shale fires continued to burn, severely polluting the environment. Furthermore, as this oil shale burned, it produced radioactive thorium, uranium, and radium.

In 1987, the Soviet Union announced plans to start up a trial mine, half-way between Tallinn and Narva, on some phosphorite deposits that had been discovered in the 1970's. This project raised two concerns in the eyes of the Estonians. The first was the mine's proximity to the Estonian watershed and the fear that it would contaminate drinking water supplies. The second concern was the further influx of Soviet workers that would be brought into Estonia to work the mines.

The protests against the new mines became known as "The Phosphate Spring." For the first time, Soviet policy was being swayed by public opinion, and public opinion polls made their first entry into the policy making process. Protests were held at Tartu University, but when the university press was told that "not one word" about the protests was to be printed, the publishers obeyed by printing a photograph of the protest (one in which protest banners were clearly visible and legible). Television talk shows debated the issue and even suggested that a referendum be conducted. The protesters won. On October 27, 1987, ESSR Premier Saul announced that the USSR Council of Ministers had decided to stop projects for new phosphorite mines in Estonia.⁴⁹

Two months before this official announcement was made, Estonian protests attacked a second issue. On August 23, 1987, a demonstration with several thousand participants took place at Hirvepark in Tallinn. The keynote speech demanded the publication of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, whose existence, the

⁴⁹ Taagepera., page 123-124

Soviet Union denied. Hirvepark proved that it was now possible to publicly talk about the MRP without fear of arrest or deportation. The MRP-AEG (an Estonian acronym for “The Estonian Group for Making Public the MRP”) was formed and marked the end of the underground movement fighting for full disclosure of the pact. It was now acceptable to discuss the issue in public forums.

From this point forward, events happened very quickly in Estonia. In a speech given in May 1987, Rein Taagepera stated that “history in Eastern Europe has started to move much faster than we are used to. It may leap forward, and it may also suffer disastrous backlashes.... At the glacial pace under Brezhnev, it did not matter whether one was behind events by three months. Now it matters....” Most people at this point still believed independence to be unachievable, and instead, focused their efforts on greater autonomy, especially in economics.

Spring of 1988 brought the “Spring of the Flag.” It had been illegal to fly the blue, black, and white national flag of Estonia ever since the Soviet Union reoccupied the country. Beginning on April 14, 1988, the Estonian Heritage Society began displaying the national colors publicly. Shortly, thousands of students spent entire nights waving the flag. On May 20, the national flag was displayed on the cover of *Sirp ja Vasar* of the Tenth Rock Music Days. The following month, on June 23, the ESSR Supreme Soviet legalized the flag and designated them as the “national colors” of Estonia, while still maintaining the red flag of the ESSR.

The Communist Party of Estonia’s First Secretary, Vaino, grew increasingly out of touch with events as they transpired in Estonia, and on June 16, 1988, the Kremlin

dismissed him. He was replaced by Vaino Väljas, a native Estonian. Väljas quickly altered the language structure of the CPE bureau meetings. Whereas only Russian had been allowed previously, now Estonian was permitted. Additionally, only Moscow's official emissary was provided with translation headphones. It was clear. The Estonians were gradually, bit by bit, gaining back control of their country. More than 100,000 people gathered in Tallinn the following day to celebrate.

The MRP-AEG achieved its goals on August 20, 1988, when the daily *Rahva Hää* printed the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. With their short-term goal accomplished, the MRP-AEG disbanded and reformed under the new name Estonian National Independence Party (ENIP). Their goal was nothing short of complete independence for Estonia. As Estonians became more daring with their protests and gained more control of their destiny, the Russian-Estonians began to fear for their future. In their defense, they formed their own movement called the International Movement, or Intermovement, for the protection of the rights of the Russian-Estonians.

The "Singing Revolution" (revolution without violence) reached one of its highpoints on September 11, 1988. More than 250,000 people participated in a demonstration called *Eestimaa Laul 1988* (The Song of Estonia 1988). This event is all the more remarkable when one considers that the participants equaled 20% of the population. As Estonia prepared to close out the eventful year of 1988, it celebrated twice more. In October, Enn Tarto, the last imprisoned nonviolent dissenter returned home and a terrible chapter in Estonia's history book had closed. The second event happened at almost the same time. Ever since the Soviet occupation of Estonia began, the

Soviets had falsely imposed the Moscow time-zone on them. Now, after more than forty years, Estonia returned to its proper time-zone (which it shares with Finland).

Debates in Estonia now shifted away from gaining autonomy to gaining independence. Various parties differed on how they thought independence should be accomplished. Article 72 of the constitution of the USSR read that "Each Union Republic shall retain the right freely to leave the USSR." Many argued that it was time to invoke article 72 and declare independence. Almost an equal number feared that this was inappropriate. They believed that because Estonia had been forcibly joined into the USSR, its ties were nonbinding, and therefore, they did not need permission to leave. Additionally, they feared that by invoking article 72, they would in fact be legitimizing the actions of the Soviets and may make themselves vulnerable to claims on things such as Soviet capital property on Estonian soil. At the same time, the USSR was working on altering their constitution in a way such that article 72 would no longer be available. The Estonians had to decide what to do quickly before they missed their opportunity.

As a compromise, the ESSR Supreme Soviet met on November 16, 1988, and issued the "Declaration about the Sovereignty of the Estonian SSR." It is important to note that this was a declaration of sovereignty, not of independence. The ESSR Supreme Soviet intended to show Moscow how much they disapproved of the constitutional maneuvering they were doing. The two most vital sections read:

The Estonian SSR Supreme Soviet does not agree with those alterations and amendments to the constitution of the USSR, submitted for discussion by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, which preclude the constitutional right of the Estonian SSR to self-determination....Alterations and amendments to the USSR constitution shall henceforth come into force on the territory of the Estonian SSR upon their approval by the Estonian SSR

Supreme Soviet and upon the introduction of corresponding alterations and amendments in the constitution of the Estonian SSR.

Moscow responded by declaring the Estonian sovereignty declaration unconstitutional.

Estonia's counter was to acknowledge receipt of Moscow's disapproval.

In January 1989, the ESSR Supreme Soviet reinstated Estonian as the official language of Estonia. Neither side was satisfied with this policy. The Estonians claimed that the legislation was too lenient on the Russian-speaking minority, and the Russians were unhappy by the requirement for all officials and salespeople to become proficient in Estonian within two years.

When the USSR Soviet Congress met in May 1989, the Estonian delegates attempted to get discussion of the MRP put on the agenda. They failed, but on June 1, Gorbachev announced the formation of a 26 person Soviet Congress Commission to investigate the pact. The following month, on July 20, the commission split. Fourteen members signed a statement declaring that the secret protocols did exist and that they infringed upon the rights and self-determination of the Baltic States. Gorbachev ordered the commission head not to sign the document and he complied. The Baltic people were furious.⁵⁰

On the 50th anniversary of the MRP (August 23, 1989) the Baltic people formed the "Baltic Chain", a human-chain of protest stretching from southern Lithuania to the Gulf of Finland. Estimates of the participation ranged from 1.5 to 2 million people. Rein Taagepera spoke at one of the sites that day and vividly portrayed the mood of the people.

We do not just want a goodhearted estate owner but the dividing of the estate into family farms. We do not just want a good tsar but an end to

⁵⁰ Taagepera, page 155

tsardom and a beginning of the rule of law. We do not just want a good Soviet Union but also a Soviet Union that is a good neighbor for the Baltics. Good neighborly relations presume being neighbors.

The Baltic Chain received world-wide press coverage, and for one of the first times ever, truly brought the plight of the Baltic republics to the world's attention. The event was followed by threats from the Soviet Central Committee that things had gone too far, but by this time, the Baltic States could see the end of their journey was not far away.

Until the end of 1989, the moderate Popular Front of Estonia (PFE) had been hesitant to endorse complete independence too loudly. In October 1989, that changed. They published a new platform which demanded: institution of democratic elections, obtaining the Kremlin's approval on a referendum for independence, and conclusion of a temporary treaty of confederation with the USSR that would include a fixed date for independence.⁵¹

In February 1990, a bizarre thing happened. The people of Estonia elected the Estonian Congress. The ESSR was still a fully subordinate republic of the USSR, but actually conducted full fledged general elections to elect an Estonian government. All of this was conducted while in the presence of more than 100,000 Russian troops stationed in Estonia. The turnout for the election was 98% of the eligible adults. The Congress consisted of 464 seats of which the PFE won 107, the Estonian Heritage Society won 104, the Estonian National Independence Party won 70, and the CPE won 39.⁵² The remaining seats went to independents. The highpoint of the Congress turned out to be its election. When it first convened on March 19, 1990, it turned out to be a "political flop."

⁵¹ Taagepera, page 171

⁵² *ibid.*, page 174

The failure of the Estonian Congress shortly became irrelevant. Candidates for the elections to the ESSR Supreme Soviet Council were roughly 62% pro-independence Estonians, 30% anti-independence colonists, and 8% noncommitted. The result of the election was that the anti-independence groups could not achieve the one-third vote necessary to veto major decisions. "What began as elections for the ESSR Supreme Soviet effectively produced the functioning parliament of a still-occupied Republic of Estonia."⁵³

The Estonian Supreme Soviet convened on March 30, 1990, and immediately declared that Estonia was an occupied country and stated that USSR claims on Estonia were unlawful. This was not quite a declaration of independence, but it was close. The Supreme Soviet stated that they had entered "a period of transition" leading to final independence. They were cautious about the wording because Lithuania had declared its independence on the 11th of March, and Soviet troops had begun to seize buildings in Lithuania.

Independence talks began between Moscow and Estonia on August 23, 1990, but when the Soviets only appeared willing to discuss improved federation, the Estonian delegation broke off the talks. Gorbachev had suddenly appeared to take a rigid stance against Baltic independence. The United States Secretary of State George Schultz contacted Gorbachev and expressed his confusion. "I thought you were laying the groundwork for their realization of independence."⁵⁴

⁵³ Taagepera, page 176

⁵⁴ Wall Street Journal, 9 April 1990

Everything in the Soviet Union was starting to disintegrate at this point. The Baltic States were not the only republic seeking sovereignty, the newly elected head of the Russian SSR, Boris Yeltsin, wanted the same for Russia. On October 2, 1990, Estonia and the Russian Federation prepared a draft accord jointly recognizing the Russian declaration of sovereignty (June 12, 1990) and the Estonian declaration of sovereignty (March 30, 1990). This draft accord was not signed immediately, but would be only a few months later.

As world opinion was diverted away from the Baltics by the war in the Persian Gulf in January 1991, Gorbachev increased his pressure on the Baltic States. Violence began with an armor attack in Lithuania on January 13, 1991, killing 13 civilians. The Soviet troops began their assault on secondary targets and the delay allowed mass demonstrations to surround and protect the parliament buildings. Further armed action was not possible without risking tremendous civilian casualties. Boris Yeltsin rushed to Tallinn and signed the joint statements recognizing the declarations of sovereignty mentioned above. Yeltsin also pleaded with the Russian soldiers to think of their families before they continued the violence against unarmed civilians.

The Gulf War began on January 16, and four days later, on the 20th, Soviet Black Beret special forces attacked in Riga, killing four people. On March 3, Estonia held a referendum on independence, and 78% voted in favor. Most surprising was that more than 30% of the non-Estonians voted for independence.

The Soviet Union declared that the referendums were void, but the message to the world was clear. At this point independence talks stalled. Gorbachev wanted to pass a

Union Treaty, but the Estonians would talk about nothing less than independence. Anti-independence terrorists conducted attacks at border control points and desecrated Estonian landmarks.

Everything changed with the coup in Moscow on August 19, 1991. On the second day of the coup, the Estonian Supreme Council adopted a “Resolution on the National Independence of Estonia” affirming the “national independence of the Republic of Estonia” and seeking “restoration for diplomatic relations with the Republic of Estonia.” Yeltsin not only recognized Estonia’s independence on behalf of the Russian government, but urged the USSR to do the same. The world community rallied to the side of the Baltic States and rapidly began recognition. Iceland was the first on August 22, and by the end of August, forty states had recognized them and the first foreign embassy, that of Sweden, opened in Tallinn.

The United States delayed recognition of the Baltics and granted the USSR the first opportunity. The U.S. told the Soviet government that they had until September 1, 1991, to recognize the Baltic States if they wanted to be first. The USSR delayed, and so, on September 2, 1991, the U.S. formally granted recognition. Four days later, on September 6, the Soviet Union granted recognition. The European Union had granted recognition at the end of August and mentioned a possible associate status, and the United Nations followed up on the 17th of September.

The struggle to reestablish the independence of the Republic was long and hard. The nation had paid for it in blood and misery. Throughout its history, the Estonians have always been the underdog, and they have always fought against their oppressors. They

had fought with, and been conquered by, the Swedes, Danes, Germans and Soviets, and yet despite this, had managed to persevere. The nation always managed to keep its history, its language and its hope for the future. Despite this, no foreign power ever came closer to destroying the Estonians completely than the Soviets during the Russification efforts of the late 1960's. The native Estonian percentage of the population had dropped to 68% and would have continued to fall had it not been for the luck of decreasing Russian birthrates and internal political distractions.

In the 1960's, the Soviets failed to eliminate the Estonians in spite of their best efforts. The Estonian nation had always survived, whether independent or occupied, and was just seeking the right time to assert itself. The events of Glasnost in the 1980's provided this opportunity for independence, but did not create the nationalism, nor did it give the Estonians the culture, history, language, or determination that would be required to survive in the international community.

Today Estonia continues to face many formidable tasks. Ethnic relations with its Russian minority continue to be a challenge, but clearly not as severe as Russia would like the world community to believe. The nation also faces security challenges as it tries to identify its position in the European Security Architecture. Where this position will be remains unclear, but in the past six years, Estonia has developed an Army, Navy and an Air Force. They have created a peace-keeping battalion with the other Baltic States and have performed missions in Bosnia and Lebanon. Estonia hopes to become a member of NATO, but that issue is still in question. In the meantime, they have contented themselves

with active participation in the Partnership for Peace program and continue to expand their peacekeeping capabilities.

III. ECONOMIC STABILITY

History is replete with examples of empires, nations, or governments that have been toppled as a result of internal instability. The most obvious modern example is the collapse of the Soviet Union. Upon achieving its independence, Estonia's greatest threat to internal stability (not to be confused with an internal threat of Soviet armed forces still in the country) was its poor economy. Lack of food, housing, jobs and money are a poor environment to establish a democratic government based on public consent. If Estonia had any hope of securing its future, it had to stabilize its economic situation.

Providing internal stability is not the only reason why developing a successful economy was vital to Estonia's national security interests; there are at least two other reasons. First, a stable economy would help Estonia reach its goal of membership in the European Union and NATO. Both organizations hope that enlarging will not place too much of an economic burden on existing member nations. By having an established and prosperous economy, Estonia can show the EU and NATO that they are prepared to contribute to the burden-sharing responsibilities of these alliances. The second aspect of a successful economy is that it would allow for greater defense expenditures. One of Estonia's present weaknesses is that lack of money has resulted in slowed arms purchases and force modernization.

Although Estonia had developed a vibrant economy during its interwar years of independence, this was quickly destroyed during the forty years of Soviet rule following the Second World War. "The period following the war was characterized by rapid industrialization as a result of aggressive capital formation and forced labor movements -

from agriculture to industry, and from other parts of the Soviet Union (notably Russia) into Estonia.”⁵⁵ Despite the fact that Soviet mismanagement destroyed the Estonian economy, the Estonians still enjoyed the highest standard of living among the republics of the former Soviet Union. The per capita income in Estonia was 40 percent higher than the rest of the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

The movements for political and economic independence from the Soviet Union during the late 1980’s finally resulted in the approval of a law on economic autonomy by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1989. This law had several effects. It opened the way for economic reforms including price and wage determination, fiscal policy, and financial sector policies.⁵⁷ Once Estonia declared its independence on August 20, 1991, the last remaining obstacles to economic reform were removed.

During 1990 and 1991, Estonia began comprehensive price reform. Government subsidies declined from 13 percent of the GDP in the late 1980’s to just 2.2 percent in 1991. This freed significant amounts of money for the government to spend elsewhere. The most obvious and severe result of the price reform was large price increases resulting in a cost of living index that rose by 210 percent in 1991.

The government did not attempt to fully index wages to prices and as a result, real wages decreased by 40 percent in 1991. The World Bank Country Study of Estonia published in 1993 stated that “the decrease in real wages that followed price liberalization was consistent with macroeconomic stability, since it reduced the excess demand for

⁵⁵ World Bank Country Study, xv

⁵⁶ In 1991, Estonia’s per capita income was estimated at \$3,700. During the same year, the former Soviet Union averaged \$2,600

⁵⁷ World Bank Country Study, xv

goods and the costs of redundant labor in the state enterprises.” Some of the money the government saved on its expensive subsidies was redirected to pensioners and other low income groups to offset their loss in buying power.

Despite the sharp decrease in real wages, the price reform had many positive effects. The Estonian trade balance moved from a deficit of 2.5 percent to surplus of 8.4 percent between 1990 and 1991. It also increased the amount of budget surplus which grew from two percent to six percent between 1990 and 1991. The government was also able to maintain low levels of unemployment, with a rate of only 0.5 percent in 1991.

The ultimate aim of the Estonia’s monetary policy is the stability of the national currency and sustainable economic growth, and one of the most significant steps to ensure this was the creation of a national currency. The kroon was created on June 20, 1992, by Parliament and the Currency Reform Committee and is pegged to the Deutschmark at a rate of 8:1. Despite these steps however, it has taken several years for the shock of early economic reforms to stabilize. As an example, unemployment has risen slightly to 4.4 percent, the country is now maintaining a trade deficit (2.6 billion kroon in exports and 4.2 billion kroon in imports as of November 1996), and in 1996 the consumer price index rose 23.1 percent.⁵⁸

Almost universally, experts are praising Estonia’s accomplishments and give optimistic hope for the future. The Estonian government is quick to point out that while comparisons with states of the former Soviet Union may be justified, comparisons with other East European countries does not provide fair assessment. This is because most of the former Warsaw Pact countries began their economic reform when the Berlin Wall

came down in 1989. Estonia was delayed by two years until it gained its independence in 1991. In spite of this, Estonia still fairs well in such comparisons.

The 1995 Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom stated that “of all of the former Soviet republics, the Baltic country of Estonia has been the most successful in reforming its economy.” The Index considered ten factors: trade policy, taxation, government consumption of economic output, monetary policy, capital flows and foreign investment, banking, wage and price controls, property rights, regulation and the black market. Of the 101 countries studied, seven were given a “free” score, 36 were “mostly free,” 50 were “mostly not free,” and eight were considered “repressed.” Estonia was 17th with a rating of “mostly free.” The only central or east European nation with a higher score was the Czech Republic at 12th.⁵⁹ The Heritage Foundation explains that the Index is useful as a snapshot of an economy at a given time, so that even though Estonia was rated at 17th and Sweden was rated at 24th, does not mean that Estonia has a better economy. This is because Sweden has been “mostly free” for much longer than Estonia which only gained its independence in 1991. The Foundation predicts that if the trends in these economies continue however, that the Estonian economy could eventually surpass Sweden’s.

A January 1995 article in the Economist Intelligence Unit’s weekly, Business Eastern Europe, also praised the successes of the Estonian economy. The article stated that “Estonia is one of three countries that stand out in their stability, prosperity and

⁵⁸ Estonia Today, January 22, 1997

⁵⁹ The seven “free” countries were in order: Hong Kong, Singapore, Bahrain, U.S., Japan, Taiwan, and the UK. The countries considered mostly free above Estonia were: Canada, Germany, Austria, Bahamas, Czech Republic, S. Korea, Malaysia, Australia and Ireland.

attractiveness along with Slovenia and the Czech Republic." In terms of foreign investment, the same article continued to describe Estonia as the "most attractive prospect, thanks to an ambitious three-year privatization program involving utilities and transport enterprises." Later it described the kroon as "among the hardest currencies in Eastern Europe," and explained that Estonia operates liberal currency and banking regimes.

In 1989, the United States Congress passed the Support for Eastern European Democracy Act (SEED). This program is administered by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and has three goals: re-establishing pluralistic democracy, promoting economic reform, and supporting environmental protection.

United States humanitarian and food assistance began arriving in Estonia in October 1991 shortly after Estonia regained its independence. As of March 31, 1996, USAID assistance to Estonia had reached approximately \$30 million. The United States has also contributed another \$20 million in agricultural assistance.⁶⁰ At the end of Fiscal Year 1996 though, Estonia had the distinction of being the first nation receiving USAID support under the SEED Act to graduate from the program, and USAID closed its offices in Estonia declaring that Estonia had achieved "broad consensus for reform among political leaders, a liberal trade regime, responsible fiscal and monetary policies, timely privatization of small and medium-sized enterprises and land restitution, and legislation which invites foreign investment."⁶¹ The Estonian government takes great pride in the fact that they graduated first from the program in spite of their two-year delay at the

⁶⁰ USAID Press Release, Estonia Graduates from U.S. Foreign Assistance

⁶¹ USAID Press Release, USAID Program in Estonia under the SEED Act

beginning, and they have proudly adopted the motto “Trade not Aid” as the mantra of their economic policy.

Estonia has declared that achieving membership in the European Union is not only its primary economic objective, but also its primary political objective. On February 18, 1997, the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, stated that “the enlargement of the EU will signal the final end of the separation and hostility of the Cold War, and the constructive building of a new integrated Europe, united economically and politically at last.”⁶²

Estonia has several concerns about their consideration for EU membership. The first is that they will be considered as just one of a block of Baltic States. Estonia does not wish to have membership in EU tied to the economic achievements of Latvia and Lithuania. The second concern is that Estonia has had to overcome the “two-year head start” of the nations of the former Warsaw Pact. “When the EU makes its enlargement decision, all that Estonia asks for is a fair chance. A fair chance to be evaluated on the success of our reforms.”⁶³

The Foreign Minister also pointed to a report from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development published in November 1996 which “ranked Estonia behind only Hungary and the Czech Republic in progress in economic transition.” Another major point made was that Estonia already met three of the four official requirements for entrance into the European Monetary System (an achievement many EU member states have not accomplished). The fourth criteria, inflation, is getting very close.

⁶² Speech by Toomas Hendrik Ilves to the European Commission at Bonn on February 18, 1997

⁶³ *ibid.*

During 1996, Estonia's inflation was 15%, but this was down from 28.8% in 1995, and four digit inflation in 1992.

Estonia has already begun the process of formally integrating itself into the European Union. The first step was the signing of Estonia's Europe Agreement, which the Estonian parliament, the Riigikogu, unanimously ratified on August 1, 1995. The second step was the official application to the EU according to Article O of the Maastricht Treaty, which happened on November 28, 1995. The third and final formal step was the completion of the European Commission's questionnaire. This was completed during the summer of 1996 and was more than 2,000 pages in length.

Besides these formal actions, Estonia has already achieved economic integration into the European Union on a practical level. As an example, in 1995, Estonia imported more from the EU (as a percentage of its total imports) than Germany, Finland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom or France. Ilves declared that "practically speaking, we are already members of the common market."⁶⁴

Whether or not the European Union decides to expand, and if such an expansion will include Estonia remains to be seen. The one fact that remains clear is that Estonia has pulled itself out of the decades of economic ruin brought about by Soviet mismanagement. Estonia is commonly accepted as the most economically successful of the Baltic States, and only behind the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia (or fewer depending on which source you use) in terms of economic strength. Estonia has attracted more than 110 major companies from the United States alone, including Apple Computer, Bell Helicopter, Dow

⁶⁴ Speech by Toomas Hendrik Ilves to the European Commission at Bonn on February 18, 1997

Chemical, IBM and many others. It was the first to achieve its independence from American financial aid, and are well on the way to meeting all four requirements of the EU's monetary union. Although there may have been some doubt in the early 1990's, it is now clear that Estonia can expect economic stability in the near and mid-term, and that this will no longer be a source of internal instability.

IV. SOVIET / RUSSIAN THREAT

The achievement of Estonian independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left Estonia in a precarious position both politically and militarily. The Soviets had maintained more than 130,000 soldiers in Estonia during the Cold War and were reluctant to negotiate their withdrawal. In fact, Estonian President Meri and Russian President Yeltsin did not sign a treaty outlining the terms of withdrawal of all remaining Russian forces until July 7, 1994. This agreement excluded the nuclear submarine base at Paldiski which was dealt with separately under an agreement signed four days later.⁶⁵ The date agreed upon for the removal of the last of the Russian troops was August 31, 1994.

Along with the removal of Russian troops, another contentious issue was the Russian / Estonian border. The border was agreed upon at the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920, which concluded Estonia's War of Independence, but 2,300 km² of Estonian territory was annexed by the USSR at the end of the Second World War. "In 1994, President Boris Yeltsin pledged on a visit to the Russian side of the border that his country would not return one centimeter of territory."⁶⁶

A third area of hostility between Estonia and Russia exists as a result of the large number of Russian minorities in Estonia. At the time of independence, Russians comprised approximately 35 percent of the population. The Russian government was often vocal about what they believed was the mistreatment of these minorities. They

⁶⁵ Corley, page 110

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

declared that it was their national responsibility to ensure the fair treatment of its citizens abroad.

Yet another area which inflames Russian/Estonian relations is the Estonian desire to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. While Russia has repeatedly opposed the admission of former members of the Warsaw Pact into the alliance, they are even more adamant when discussion has included nations of the former Soviet Union.

These flashpoints of Russian-Estonian relations have been accompanied by very threatening statements from all elements of Russian society, from its politicians, to its academics and its citizens. One of the most vocal of the Russian nationalists is the 1996 presidential candidate Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a man who believes that the 'republics must be made to come back. How? By not being kind toward them...' ⁶⁷ He called Estonia a 'nation of 900,000 people, and all of them thieves.' ⁶⁸ When asked what his policy would be toward the Baltics if he were elected president, he replied:

I'll start by squeezing the Baltics and other small nations. I don't care if they are recognized by the United Nations. I'm not going to invade them or anything. I'll bury radioactive waste along the Lithuanian border and put up powerful fans and blow the stuff across the border at night... They'll all get radiation sickness. They'll die of it. When they either die out or get down on their knees, I'll stop it. I'm a dictator. What I'm going to do is bad, but it'll be good for Russia." ⁶⁹

Some may state that this is just election year rhetoric, but the concern in Estonia is that if this kind of talk produces votes, then what does the public really think? Do they support these ideas? And if this kind of statement were to get him elected, would he not then have

⁶⁷ Moscow Kuranty, December 16, 1993

⁶⁸ Tallinn BNS, December 14, 1993

⁶⁹ Remarks reportedly made at a parliamentary session shortly after the August 1991 coup, reported by the Associated Press in The Washington Times, December 15, 1993

a public mandate to implement some of his election promises? Zhironovskiy also stated ‘Estonia. There are Russians living there. This territory must therefore be included within Russia’s borders... But Tallinn... should remain a kind of city republic, like Luxembourg, Monaco, or Liechtenstein. The rest of Estonian territory belongs to Russia.’⁷⁰

Inflammatory statements such as these have not just come from ultra-nationalists, in many cases, they come from academics and politicians. On April 27, 1996, Russian defense analyst, Anton Surikov, from the Russian Defense Research Institute, gave an interview to the Estonian newspaper *Postimees*. During this interview, Mr. Surikov stated that ‘If a genuine attempt is made to make the Baltic States members of NATO, we will move our troops into the Baltic States. This is unavoidable.’⁷¹ When asked if he was alone in this opinion, he responded ‘It is not I alone who has said that. Minister for Defense Grachev announced that the taking of the Baltic States into NATO would be the last drop into Russia’s chalice of suffering.’⁷²

Pavel Grachev has in fact made such comments also. On September 25, 1995, the Associated Press quoted him: ‘What is the line at which Russia starts a military build-up and seeks new military alliances? The limit, please, is when the Baltic countries become NATO members.’ One month later, on October 30, 1995, he was quoted in ITAR-TASS as saying ‘If this will happen [the enlargement of NATO, including the Baltic States], then the [Russian] military doctrine, defensive so far, has to be rewritten....For sure, we have to take unpopular but adequate measures.’

⁷⁰ Rome, L’Espresso, “Prague? Let Us Give It to Germany,” January 21, 1994

⁷¹ Mihkelson, *Postimees*, April 27, 1996

⁷² *ibid.*

There can be little doubt that statements such as these do not create an environment for improved relations. While comments from presidential long-shot ultra-nationalists might be discounted, similar comments from leading defense advisors, high ranking military officers, and ministers are difficult (if not downright irresponsible) to ignore. Recently however, there appears to have been a shift in Russia's willingness to work with NATO.

In Paris, on May 27, 1997, Russia signed a pact with the North Atlantic Alliance entitled the Founding Act on Mutual Relations Cooperation and Security between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The Founding Act will "become the foundation for a new, fair and stable partnership, a partnership which takes into account the security interests of each and every signatory...."⁷³ It will give Russia a voice in NATO decisions, but not a veto. While it is true that "Russia still views negatively the expansion plans of NATO,"⁷⁴ the signing of the Founding Act may indicate a shift in Russian foreign policy that is more tolerant of NATO enlargement. Whether this tolerance will continue if and when enlargement includes the Baltic States remains to be seen.

⁷³ Text from Russian President Yeltsin before signing pact on May 27, 1997

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

V. DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE CAPABILITIES

Estonian Minister of Defense Andrus Öövel has repeatedly stated that the defense doctrine of Estonia is based on “two complimentary and interdependent principles: an independent national defense capability and international military cooperation.”⁷⁵ Recognizing that a “national defense system is a necessary feature of a nation’s independence and sovereignty,”⁷⁶ and with the knowledge that no Western nation would help them if they did not prove willing to help themselves, Estonia set about developing its armed forces.

Estonia’s defense forces date back to the formation of the First Estonian Regiment in 1917 which fought along side Russia’s military during the First World War. This regiment formed the nucleus for the forces which fought against Russia in the Estonian War of Independence from 1918-1920. Unfortunately, Estonia’s national defense forces were dissolved in 1939 with the beginning of World War II and the subsequent Soviet occupation.

The first real steps in the reconstruction of the Estonian military came in 1990 when the Estonian Border Guard was reestablished. The following year, on October 31, 1991, the government created the General Staff of the Defense Forces, and the Ministry of Defense was reestablished in April 1992. The Estonian Parliament, the Riigikogu, then began work on a series of laws affecting national defense and security. Among these laws were the Peacetime National Defense Law, the Wartime Defense Law, the Law on

⁷⁵ Öövel, page 7

Deploying the Regular Armed Forces by Fulfilling the International Obligations of the Republic of Estonia and the Law on the Service in the Defense Forces.⁷⁷

A significant step in the improvement of the Estonia military was the assignment of Aleksander Einseln as the commander of the Estonia Defense Forces in 1993. Einseln was born in Estonia in 1931 and fled Soviet occupation with his family and eventually settled in the United States. There he became a U.S. citizen, graduated from George Washington University, and was commissioned as an officer in the United States Army. Einseln served in the U.S. military from 1950 until 1985, retiring as a colonel.⁷⁸

One challenge that faced Einseln as he took his new job was threats from Washington DC to revoke his U.S. citizenship and withdraw his pension. The United States Congress passed special laws clearing the way for Einseln to assume the position, and he subsequently readopted Estonian citizenship upon his appointment.⁷⁹ Einseln agreed with Öövel's later contention⁸⁰ that defense policy had to be based upon integration with the west, and creating an independent defense capability designed along Western lines.

One of his first steps was to declare that the "old Soviet practice of *dedovshchina* (hazing, or brutal treatment of new recruits) would not be tolerated."⁸¹ Einseln quickly created a Naval Department on July 1, 1993, and on February 1, 1994, Captain Roland Leit was appointed the Commander of the Navy. Two months later Colonel Vello

⁷⁶ Öövel, page 7

⁷⁷ Estonia Today, May 9, 1996

⁷⁸ Corley, page 107

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Andrus Öövel did not become Defense Minister until April 17, 1995

⁸¹ Corley, page 108

Loemaa was appointed as the Commander of the Air Force, which was created on April 13, 1994.⁸²

The Defense Ministry remained weak during the years following its creation. This is largely due to the fact that Estonia suffered a “string of defense ministers...some remaining in office for as little as a couple of months.”⁸³ One minister, Hain Rebas, was forced to quit in August 1993 after an army unit mutinied in Tallinn. With the Defense Ministry remaining weak as a result of turbulent leadership, many of the responsibilities for the formulation of defense policy fell upon the Estonian General Staff.

Much of this changed when Andrus Öövel was appointed as Estonia’s Defense Minister on April 17, 1995. Öövel, who was only 38 years old, immediately set forth establishing the primacy of the Defense Ministry in the creation of defense policy and setting guidelines for the General Staff to follow. Much of his effort was motivated by NATO’s insistence on civilian political control over the military. Estonia had had civilians holding the position of defense minister since 1992, but in reality, they were exercising very little political control. “[Öövel’s] period in office has brought much needed stability at the helm of the Defense Ministry and has done much to delineate what lies within the competence respectively of the Defense Ministry and the General Staff.”⁸⁴

The struggle for power between the Defense Ministry and the General Staff grew in intensity, pitting Öövel against Einseln. The dispute became highly publicized at the end of 1995 as the two exchanged insults through the media. On December 3, 1995, President

⁸² Estonia Today, May 9, 1996

⁸³ Corley, page 108

Meri relieved Einseln as the Commander in Chief, and on January 12, 1996, he appointed Colonel Johannes Kert as Einseln's replacement.

The geographical reality of Estonia's landscape makes it difficult to defend. More than half of Estonia's border consists of coastline. Combine this fact with Estonia being sandwiched between the Russian oblast Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg, and the Estonians view naval threats coming from both directions. The Russian Baltic Fleet is headquartered in Kaliningrad and maintains naval bases in Kronshtadt and Baltiysk, and despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fleet is still an impressive force, with six tactical submarines, three destroyers, 28 frigates and approximately 42 other coastal and patrol combatants. The fleet also maintains eight amphibious ships, a naval infantry brigade (with 25 main battle tanks and 34 multiple rocket launchers), and 118 other support and miscellaneous ships.⁸⁵ It is unlikely that the Estonians would be able to prevent an amphibious landing with their national forces alone.

Estonia's land borders do not provide a much improved defense. Although the border lands tend to consist of swampy forests, Estonia has long since developed a dense infrastructure of small roads facilitating the rapid advance of mobile armored forces. Additionally, the most developed highway in Estonia links Tallinn with St. Petersburg and runs along the corridor most strongly affected by the Russification practices of the Cold War. Some places along this highway, especially Kohtla Jarve, had Russian populations of more than 90 percent. As is true with the maritime threat, the proximity of large ground units presents a possible threat to Estonia. The Russian Northern District is headquartered

⁸⁴ Corley, page 108

⁸⁵ Military Balance 1996/97, page 118

in St. Petersburg and consists of one Army HQ, one Corps HQ, five Motorized Rifle Divisions, one Airborne Division, and three Independent Motorize Rifle Brigades, a total of approximately 54,000 soldiers.⁸⁶ Tallinn is only approximately 200 miles from St. Petersburg.

Air defense is another difficult task based on the geography of Estonia. The country is roughly 160 miles in diameter which means that, with today's aircraft, most targets in Estonia can be reached in 20 minutes flight time from across the border. Russian special forces stationed around Pskow can reach Tallinn in less than an hour. Additionally, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union had prepared many "emergency airstrips (pre-densed soil, heavy-load service roads)."⁸⁷ These airstrips would provide excellent drop-zones or landing-zones, and the sheer number of them would preclude adequate coverage by defense forces.

Based on these geographic realities, and the demographic and economic restrictions which prevent the maintenance of a large standing army, Einseln outlined his defense plan in 1994. He portrayed Estonia as a "hornets' nest" in which "a lot of people will sting." He clarified this by stating:

Estonia's tactics will be to engage any invaders in one heroic open battle, if only to record the fact that it did resist the attack. Then its soldiers will disappear into the forests and bogs to pursue the war indefinitely, like their predecessors, the 'forest brothers', who carried on fighting for nearly two decades after the end of the Second World War... The example of 1940, when Soviet troops poured in without a shot being fired, still haunts Estonians today. This will not happen again as long as I am commander.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Military Balance 1996/97, page 115

⁸⁷ Lange, page 2

⁸⁸ Warren, September 4, 1994

In 1996, Minister of Defense Andrus Öövel expressed similar beliefs when he explained Estonian defense policy in NATO Review. “Because the size of our armed forces does not enable us to create a continuous front to stop an attacking force at the border, we must rely on mobile and territorial defense tactics.”⁸⁹

The mobile forces he envisions would “resist an invading army’s advance from tactically favorable positions on the principle of attack and hide.”⁹⁰ Hopefully, such tactics would slow down attacking forces, while ensuring minimal losses to the defenders. These mobile units would consist of the best trained and equipped, and most mobile units of the Estonian armed forces.

The territorial defensive tactics would be undertaken by forces operating in assigned regions, to stop and destroy the enemy in their specific areas. Each of these territorial units would fight battles in their regions independent of success or failure in surrounding areas. The byproduct would be a defensive system which would impose heavy casualties on the attacker, while providing a national defense system which would be very difficult to destroy completely.

Territorial defense would be conducted by the Defense League, known as the *Kaitseliit*. The *Kaitseliit*’s main task is to “contribute to forming battalions of territorial forces, as well as conducting training and ensuring fighting effectiveness.”⁹¹ The force is comprised of three companies located in Tallinn, Nomme and Haanja, and 17 territorial groups. The strength of these “groups” can vary from 80 to 200 men, depending on the

⁸⁹ Öövel, page 8

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

size of the town. "Every group is responsible for the defense of its locality and retains a combat element to reinforce the regular army in wartime."⁹² The total strength of the *Kaitseliit* was reported by *Jane's Intelligence Review* of March 1996 as 7,000, and by *Military Balance* 1996/1997 as 6,000. Regardless of their strength, the *Kaitseliit* is comprised solely of volunteers.

This is different from the regular forces of the military which depend on conscription to generate recruits. Current policy requires military service usually lasting one year (11 weeks basic training, plus 39 weeks of active duty),⁹³ and conscripts can serve in the army, navy, air force, border guards or the Interior Ministry's quick reaction force. Conscription in Estonia has only achieved moderate success for a number of reasons. The process met with open resistance during the late 1980's and remains unpopular today. For example, fill rates sometimes reach only 50 percent. During the third quarter of 1995, 2,292 men failed to be recruited, "of which 1,937 did not respond to the summons, 123 were abroad and 232 could not be located."⁹⁴ Police are often unwilling or unable to pursue draft evaders due to other priorities.

Besides evasion, another problem with the conscription system is the large number of people exempted from it. Only males are subject to the draft and approximately 4,000 of these are exempted annually for medical, family or study reasons. Additionally, "current conscription rules mean that the large number of Russian speakers who have not been given citizenship are excluded from service."⁹⁵ This is intended to prevent young

⁹² Marx, page 53

⁹³ Corley, page 109

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

Russians from gaining military training that may one day be used against Estonia. The Russian speakers who do enter service are distributed evenly throughout units to encourage them to learn the Estonian language.

Once a young man is recruited into the military, there is a good chance that he will serve in the infantry. Öövel and others readily admit that the primary service is the army, and that all other services exist to support it. Similarly, within the army, the primary branch is infantry. According to Öövel, this is because “infantry scattered throughout the country is the most reliable defense. Infantry units are hard to locate and destroy, and invasion of the territory would demand sizable forces from the enemy, with a high probability of unacceptable losses.”⁹⁶

As a result, the defense forces of Estonia center around four infantry battalions. These battalions are authorized 66 officers, 167 non-commissioned officers, and 573 enlisted men, but each is understrength.⁹⁷ The main combat unit is the infantry squad, so much of Estonia’s weapon purchases have focused on automatic and semi-automatic machine guns and assault rifles, antitank rocket launchers and light artillery.

Like the army, the Estonian Navy is also small. Based out of the former Russian nuclear submarine base of Paldiski, the navy is comprised of three patrol cutters, two minesweepers, and three support ships. The patrol vessel *Ahti* was donated by Denmark in 1994, and the two *Kondor* class minesweepers, *Sulev* and *Vambola* were donated by Germany the same year.⁹⁸ For all intents and purpose, the Estonian Air Force exists in

⁹⁶ Öövel, page 8

⁹⁷ Corley, page 109

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

name alone, with one Mi-2 helicopter making up its aircraft inventory. Acquiring further aircraft has been a concern of the government's.

It is easy to be shocked by the small size of the Estonian armed forces when looking simply at the numbers. This is usually because the size of an army is measured in one's mind by using countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France or Germany as a measuring stick. A more accurate comparison might be made by looking at two such NATO members as Iceland (with no military at all), or with Luxembourg (whose army is approximately the same size as Estonia's). In fact, two of NATO's staunchest supporters, Norway and Denmark, both have armed forces numbering fewer than 35,000.

Another measure of a nation's willingness to provide for its own defense is its defense expenditures. In 1995, Estonia spent 5.3 percent of its GDP on defense. Not only is this a higher percentage than the United States (who spent 3.8 percent), but it is also higher than every other NATO country (Greece and Turkey were the only countries spending more than four percent), and every other non-NATO country in Europe, with the exception of the warring countries of the former Yugoslavia and Russia.⁹⁹

Estonia realizes that lack of money is a hindrance to force modernization and development of interoperability with NATO forces. They hope that with the continued goodwill of Western nations and the Estonian nation's continued willingness to dedicate a high percentage of their GDP to defense expenditures, they can continue to improve their internal defense capabilities and further their integration into Western security structures.

⁹⁹ Bosnia-Herzegovina spent 18.8%, Croatia spent 12.6%, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia spent 7.8%, Serbia-Montenegro spent 22.5%, and Russia spent 7.4%. (Military Balance, 1996/1997)

VI. INTEGRATION INTO THE EUROPEAN SECURITY

ARCHITECTURE

As Estonia tries to create a place for itself in the European security architecture, its focus remains membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Western European Union. Estonia is not alone in this focus. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many former Warsaw Pact nations are seeking security guarantees from their former adversaries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Among the states surrounding the Baltic Sea seeking membership are Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. The historically non-aligned countries of Finland and Sweden have both decided to maintain their stances of neutrality. Of the four Baltic Sea nations who have publicly stated that they seek admission to the North Atlantic Alliance, Poland is commonly accepted as the only one likely to receive early admission (along with the Czech Republic, Hungary, and possibly Slovenia).¹⁰⁰ Despite this fact, the Baltic States have urged that the door not be closed after the first round of enlargement.¹⁰¹ All five of the Nordic countries support this view (Denmark, Norway, and Iceland are members of NATO), and the President of the United States and the U.S. Secretary of State have both promised that the door to NATO will not close after the first round.¹⁰²

As a method of transitioning countries to prepare for possible NATO membership, the North Atlantic Alliance developed a program named Partnership for Peace (PfP).¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ New York Times, December 11, 1996, page 1, "NATO takes steps to expand ranks into East Europe"

¹⁰¹ Girmius, October 10, 1996

¹⁰² Rothberg, September 27, 1996

¹⁰³ NATO Review, May 1995, "NATO's Expansion: The big debate"

The PfP program has many goals, but perhaps the most important is to improve (or in most cases, establish) interoperability of the military forces with those of NATO. This includes everything from ammunition, to radios and doctrine. Other objectives include establishing democratic control over the militaries, building trust, and improving the ability of states to provide for their own self-defense or to participate in international peace-keeping operations.¹⁰⁴ All three Baltic States are members of PfP.

The Baltic States have actively participated in exercises directly associated with the Partnership for Peace program, and exercises conducted “in the spirit of PfP.” Since joining in 1994, Estonia has participated in “BALTOP 95,” “Cooperative Nugget 95,” “Cooperative Jaguar,” “Cooperative Challenge,” “Cooperative Spirit,” “Sharp Guard,” “Best Effort,” and “Baltic Challenge 96.” These exercises not only improve the ability of member nations to conduct operations, but they also serve to prove to NATO a nation’s motivation, capabilities, and potential for membership. Although it has never been officially stated, it is commonly accepted that, while not a prerequisite, joining Partnership for Peace is the first step along the road to NATO admission.¹⁰⁵

There is a second collective defense organization in Europe named the Western European Union (WEU). Evolving out of the Brussels Treaty of 1948, the Paris Agreements of 1954 modified and renamed the alliance. Today, the Western European

¹⁰⁴ Joulwan, March 1995, “NATO’s military contribution to Partnership for Peace: the progress and the challenge”

¹⁰⁵ This argument is presented in both Robert Hunter’s article “Enlargement: Part of a strategy for projecting stability into Central Europe” and in Williams’ article “NATO’s expansion: The big debate”

Union serves two primary purposes. The first is to function as the defense component of the European Union. The second is to strengthen the European pillar of NATO.¹⁰⁶

Although the WEU lacks the assets to conduct complex military operations (strategic lift, organic headquarters and satellite intelligence being the three most significant), the North Atlantic Alliance has committed to providing assistance through the use of Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF's). "When implemented, the concept of "Combined Joint Task Forces" will enable asset-sharing between the WEU and NATO to take place and allow the maximum possible use of forces that already exist."¹⁰⁷

On May 9, 1994, the WEU Council of Ministers published the "Kirchberg Declaration." Among other things, this declaration established a "system of variable geometry"¹⁰⁸ creating three different levels of membership and an observer status. Full Member status is reserved for those nations that are NATO members and EU members. Associate Member status is granted to those nations who belong to NATO, but not to the European Union. The main innovation was the establishment of the Associate Partner status. This status is granted to nations which are neither members of NATO nor of the EU¹⁰⁹ and allowed Estonia to participate in the WEU where they had been previously excluded.

As mentioned previously, Estonia desperately wants to join the European Union. They believe that EU membership is necessary to ensure economic stability and increase

¹⁰⁶ NATO Handbook, pgs.196-199

¹⁰⁷ Højberg, June 1995

¹⁰⁸ NATO Handbook, page 200

¹⁰⁹ ibid.

their ties with the west. Similarly, it follows that they are also seeking subsequent admission to the WEU as full members, to ensure their security, and also to further their integration with the west. Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland are all very vocal advocates of this process.

One of the arguments often presented against admitting the Baltic States into institutions such as NATO and the WEU is that they are too small.¹¹⁰ The consensus opinion of those that support this argument is that Estonia and the other Baltic States would be security consumers and not security contributors. Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty claims that “any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area” may be invited to join NATO. The argument assumes that the Baltic States are too small to “contribute to the security” as stated in Article 10. In an effort to disprove this argument, Aleksander Einseln suggested the creation of a joint peacekeeping force during a meeting of Baltic military commanders in Tallinn, in November 1993.¹¹¹ This Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion became known as BALTBAT.

The Danish Minister of Defense, Hans Haekkerup, has described Denmark’s efforts to promote Baltic integration with the west by saying that since Denmark does “not have the resources to make a noticeable contribution by cooperating individually with all the Central and Eastern European countries...” they have decided that “...rather

¹¹⁰ Three authors presenting this argument are Anatol Lieven (who once supported the Baltic admission and is the author of The Baltic Revolution cited elsewhere in this paper) in his article “Baltic iceberg dead ahead,” and Ronald Asmus and Robert Nurick, who co-authored “NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States”

¹¹¹ Estonia Today, 1995, “The Baltic Peace-Keeping Battalion”

than do a little in many places, we will do as much as possible closer to home... We have found that the area where Denmark as an individual nation can make a difference is in our own neighborhood, the Baltic region.”¹¹² The most visible result of their efforts is the creation and implementation of the BALTBAT. He also stated that “the U.N. needs more peacekeeping troops and the new Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion places the Baltic republics firmly on the world scene as being able to contribute to international peacekeeping duties.”¹¹³ In addition to the five Scandinavian nations, the United Kingdom actively participated in BALTBAT’s development providing basic infantry and language training.¹¹⁴ “The United States, Poland and Germany are contributing equipment and the Netherlands and France have participated as observers.”¹¹⁵

Most of 1994 was spent determining the viability of a joint unit such as this. In January, the commanders of the three defense forces met in Tallinn again to outline the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion’s structure, personnel distribution and training exercise schedule. Joint exercises were conducted with infantry companies from each nation, and they successfully displayed that military cooperation was possible.¹¹⁶

On September 11, 1994, the defense ministers from the Baltic States, the Nordic States and the United Kingdom signed a “Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Cooperation on the Formation of a Baltic Peace-Keeping Battalion.” This document “laid

¹¹² Haekkerup, page 15-16

¹¹³ Reuters News Service, September 11, 1994, “Denmark: Baltic States to set up peacekeeping battalion”

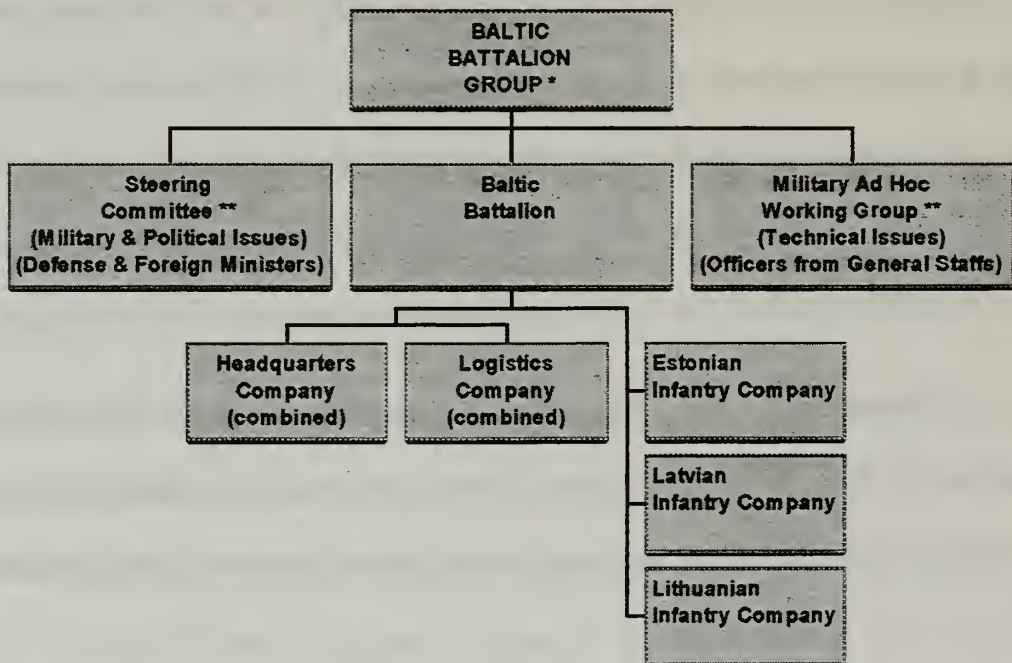
¹¹⁴ Haekkerup, page 16

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Estonia Today, 1995, “The Baltic Peace-Keeping Battalion”

a firm foundation for international political and technical support for the battalion.”¹¹⁷ Together, the signatories mentioned above formed the BALTBAT Group, which is led and coordinated by Denmark.¹¹⁸

The BALTBAT Group is divided into two areas. The first is the Steering Committee which is comprised of specialists from the defense and foreign ministries, and their purpose is to address “military and political issues.”¹¹⁹ The second is the Military Ad Hoc Working Group, and it is made up of officers from the general staffs of the signatories and provides assistance on “technical issues.”¹²⁰ The actual battalion consists of a combined battalion staff, headquarters company, and logistics company, and three nationally pure rifle companies (one each from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia).¹²¹



¹¹⁷ Estonia Today, 1995, “The Baltic Peace-Keeping Battalion”

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *ibid.*

Although the BALTBAT was not expected to be functional until 1996, most observers were pleasantly surprised to see the unit begin executing peacekeeping missions almost an entire year early. In February 1995, the first Estonian and Lithuanian forces ever to conduct peacekeeping operations began service in Croatia under a Danish Battalion.¹²² For the next 21 months, Baltic peacekeeping forces continued to serve in the region. On October 9, 1996, while serving near Tuzla with the Danish battalion as part of the Nordic Brigade, the Estonian troops were withdrawn from Bosnia to begin preparing for their next peacekeeping mission.¹²³

Upon returning from Bosnia, Baltic peacekeepers from Estonia immediately went back to work training. They had only two and a half months to prepare for their next mission - peacekeeping with the Norwegians in Lebanon.¹²⁴ After having served as part of the UN peacekeeping operations in Lebanon for 18 consecutive years (beginning in 1978), the Estonians would be the Norwegians' first replacement.¹²⁵ After two months of peacekeeping training in Norway, the Estonian company, 136 men strong, completed their deployment to Lebanon on December 5, 1996.

To date, the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion has proved to be very successful. It has become the model for many similar attempts to establish combined units, both for peacekeeping and for territorial defense. In an address at NATO Headquarters on June 14, 1996, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, William J. Perry, stated that the BALTBAT

¹²² Estonia Today, May 9, 1996, "The Defense Forces: Organization and Development"

¹²³ Estonian Review, September 30 - October 6, 1996, "ESTPLA-3 returns home"

¹²⁴ Agence France Presse, September 19, 1996, "Estonian Soldiers replace Norwegians in UN Lebanon operations"

“was used as a model for three Central Asian countries who were forming peacekeeping battalions in their countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.”¹²⁶ This unit, known as CentrasBat, will participate in the first PfP exercise to be held in Central Asia in September 1997. He also stated that “the Poles are forming a joint battalion with Lithuania, and also a joint battalion between Poland and Ukraine.”¹²⁷

The Baltic States have been equally satisfied with the results of the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion. The defense ministers of the three Baltic States met in Riga on the weekend of October 12-13, 1996,¹²⁸ and this session produced three significant results. The first was a declaration to establish a joint Baltic naval unit “to be used for regional cooperation and peacekeeping operations.”¹²⁹ The structure of the Baltic naval squadron (named BALTRON) “will not copy that of the BALTBAT, but... will go for the model which is currently used for IFOR, where, for a specific mission, a command structure is put together and vessels are put under the command of the command structure.”¹³⁰

The second major agreement called for the expansion of the BALTBAT. The Estonian Defense Minister, Andrus Oovel, stated that “we agreed that it (BALTBAT) should develop towards an infantry brigade equipped with light infantry weapons. In addition to peacekeeping missions, the unit should be able to take part in peace-

¹²⁵ Agence France Presse, September 19, 1996, “Estonian Soldiers replace Norwegians in UN Lebanon operations”

¹²⁶ Address to NATO Headquarters on June 14, 1996, by U.S. Secretary of Defense William J. Perry

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, October 19, 1996, “Estonian defense minister sums up meeting with Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts”

¹²⁹ Estonian Review, October 7-13, 1996, “Ministers of defense of three Baltic States meet in Riga”

enforcement operations.”¹³¹ Current BALTBAT project agreements end in 1997, however, the ministers agreed to seek support in continuing and enlarging missions undertaken.

The final result of the meeting was agreement on establishing a joint airspace surveillance system. Much of the success in this area will depend on U.S. support, but the United States has already offered the equipment necessary to develop the system.¹³² The Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion has achieved many of its intended results, displaying that the Baltic States could work and train together, and that they could provide forces that are not only useful, but vital in this era of ever-increasing emphasis on peacekeeping operations. The BALTBAT has served as the model for other nations to cooperate in establishing similar organizations, proved successful enough to warrant expansion to a brigade size element, and served as the inspiration for the creation of a joint Baltic naval peacekeeping force.

Estonia hopes that its success in creating its own professional national military capability, along with its demonstrated capability to work not only with other Baltic nations, but with NATO itself, will greatly improve their likelihood of gaining membership at some date in the future. Along this road, the support and cooperation of many of their neighboring countries has been critical.

¹³⁰ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, October 19, 1996, “Estonian defense minister sums up meeting with Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts”

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² *ibid.*

VII. FOREIGN RELATIONS

A. NORDIC AND BALTIC COOPERATION

*"For the first time in a very long while, the Baltic Sea is not a sea of turmoil and strife. In fact, in the last few years it has become a sea which unites rather than divides the countries surrounding it."*¹³³

When Minister of Defense Öövel described his plan for an independent national defense capability and international cooperation, he explained that international cooperation consists of four distinct areas. The first was multilateral relations which includes participation in international security and defense organizations. The second was bilateral relations which consists of defense cooperation with individual countries. The third is participation in international peace operations. The final area was Baltic cooperation which consists of defense cooperation with the littoral states around the Baltic Sea. Since the end of the Cold War, this final area of cooperation has been readily apparent.

With the statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Danish Defense Minister Hans Haekkerup accurately describes the new environment of cooperation that is flourishing in the Baltic region. This cooperation manifests itself most clearly in four fashions: partnership among the Nordic countries, among the Baltic States, among the

¹³³ Haekkerup, May 1995

Baltic Sea States, and between the Nordic and Baltic Sea States.¹³⁴ This chapter will discuss a brief history of the Baltic region to suggest possible origins of the concept of “Baltic Cooperation,” and then discuss this cooperation at the combined political, social and economic levels.

The concept of Baltic cooperation is not new. One explanation for this may be the fact that the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic States have an interwoven history. The Viking Age began in the year 793AD with the plundering of the monastery Lindesfarne on the British coast. For the next two hundred years, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian Vikings discovered, settled, or conquered lands from the North American continent to Baghdad. These 200 years had significant legal, cultural, and linguistic effects on the countries of the Baltic and North Sea region, much of which is still visible today.¹³⁵

The Nordic and Baltic Sea countries also have an interwoven history of sovereignty. Estonia and Latvia for instance, were settled by the German Teutonic Knights, but after the 13th century, these nations were ruled by the Danish, the Livonian Knights (Lithuania), Sweden, and Russia. Latvia can add Poland to this list. Lithuania has been ruled by both Poland and Russia. During the 14th century, Norway was ruled by Sweden, and beginning in the 15th century, by Denmark. In 1814, the Norwegians reverted to Swedish control exercising domestic self-rule, but under the Swedish head of state. Norway did not gain independence until 1905. These examples demonstrate the

¹³⁴ There are five Nordic states (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark), three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), and nine Baltic Sea States (Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, and Denmark)

¹³⁵ Wingate & Millard, pages. 4, 34-41

interwoven nature of the history of sovereignty among these nations and help explain some of their shared cultures, experiences, and linguistic attributes.

The small size of the Baltic Sea enabled early fishermen and traders to cross with relative ease, and the Vikings began to establish extensive trade networks throughout the littoral regions of the Baltic.¹³⁶ Two hundred years after the Viking era drew to a close, a new trading network developed in the Baltic region known as the Hanseatic League.

This league was formed initially as a collection of medieval towns from northern Germany gathering together to foster better trade and to protect themselves from foreign competition and piracy, but by 1370, the Hanseatic League had spread throughout the Scandinavian region and had acquired a monopoly on most of the trade. This innovation was the earliest version of what would, in the 20th century, develop into a common market.¹³⁷

One of the first true attempts at political, social, and economic cooperation within the Nordic/Baltic region was the Nordic Council. Founded on a Danish initiative of 1952. The original members were Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland. In 1956, Finland joined also. In 1970, the Farøe Islands, the Åland Islands, and Greenland joined.¹³⁸ The

¹³⁶ Wingate & Millard, pages. 34-41

¹³⁷ The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1995 by Columbia University Press.

¹³⁸ The Åland Islands are part of Finland and are a strategically important group of approximately 7,000 islands (of which, less than 100 inhabited) at the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia in the Baltic Sea. Originally colonized as part of Sweden, the islands were ceded to Russia in 1809, demilitarized by international agreement in 1856, and confirmed as part of Finland by the League of Nations in 1921. Finland renounced the League's guarantee of autonomy in 1951, but accorded rights of self-government to the islanders, who are largely Swedish. The Farøe Islands are a group of islands (with an estimated population of 48,000 in 1994), belonging to Denmark and located in the North Atlantic Ocean off the northern coast of Scotland. There are 18 main islands and a few small, uninhabited islands. The inhabitants speak Faeroese, a Germanic language related to Danish. They were settled by Norsemen in the 8th cent., and became part of Norway in the 11th century. They passed to the Danish crown in 1380. These facts were taken from The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia.

Council's most recent enlargement occurred in 1991. After achieving their independence, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) were given the status of observer members.¹³⁹

Established as a "cooperative link" between the parliaments and governments of participating nations, the council consists of 87 councilmen and women. These council members are selected from members of parliament from each of the participating nations. They work on joint legislation, give advice to member states, and meet every Autumn. Citizens in member countries enjoy total freedom to travel without passports and have the right to settle and work in any other member country. Upon arrival, they have the same rights as all other citizens of that country.¹⁴⁰

In 1971, a slightly different organization was created called the Nordic Council of Ministers. This is the platform for cooperation among the governments of the Nordic countries. The use of the singular word "council" here may be misleading. The Council of Ministers is not one, but several "councils of ministers." Here, ministers responsible for specific policy areas meet their counterparts several times a year (officially, foreign and defense ministers are not included in this arrangement). The main aim of the Council of Ministers is the free movement of people, goods and capital, but others include joint work on the environment, research and education.¹⁴¹

On August 21, 1996, the Baltic and Nordic foreign ministers met for the fourth time. The major topics for discussion were regional cooperation, security of the Baltic Sea area, integration of the Baltic States into the European Union, and extending visa free

¹³⁹ Nordic Council homepage, http://www.norden.org/nra/nra_uk.htm

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

travel to the Baltic States.¹⁴² As a result of this conference, the foreign ministers agreed that Russia must “participate in the creation of the future security framework of Europe and cooperation must be increased.”¹⁴³ All five of the Nordic states also agreed that accession negotiations for the Baltic States into the European Union should occur simultaneously, and that they would offer “strong support for a quick and successful integration.”¹⁴⁴

Currently, Denmark, Finland and Sweden are members of the EU. These three nations were the first EU members to ratify Estonia’s Europe Agreement, allowing associate member status.¹⁴⁵ Estonia credits this new status for their tremendous increase in foreign direct investment. As an example, Finland accounted for 22% of Estonia’s foreign investment (#1), and Sweden for 20% (#2) in 1995, and by the end of the first quarter of 1996, these numbers were up to 37.6% and 23.9% respectively.¹⁴⁶

The final area of discussion was freedom of passage in the Baltic-Nordic area. They agreed that this would be a “significant step towards regional cooperation,”¹⁴⁷ and agreed to continue working the issue. Free movement already exists between all of the Baltic States, and Estonia has visa-free travel with Denmark, and is currently negotiating for the same from Finland.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ Nordic Council of Ministers homepage, http://www.norden.org/nmr/nmr_se.htm

¹⁴² Estonian Review, August 19-25, 1996, “Baltic and Nordic Foreign Ministers Meet”

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Estonian Review, August 19-25, 1996, “Foreign direct investments in Estonia”

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Estonian Review, August 19-25, 1996, “Baltic and Nordic Foreign Ministers Meet” and “Visa-Free Travel with Finland”

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

Another regional organization that promotes cooperation is the Baltic Council of Ministers. Initially, following the First World War, the three Baltic States did not unite in solidarity, mainly due to the border conflicts that Lithuania still had with Poland and Germany, and the desire of Latvia and Estonia not to get involved.¹⁴⁹ By 1934, however, the political environment in Europe had changed significantly, and the Baltic States no longer felt that it was safe to stand alone. That year, they created the Baltic Entente, a loose union which sought security through joint diplomacy.¹⁵⁰ This entente would not last long because it was overcome by the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact five years later and the Soviet occupation that followed the Second World War.

When the Baltic States achieved independence in 1991, they quickly realized that the secret to their successful existence (politically, economically, and militarily) lay in cooperation. The Baltic Council of Ministers was formed on May 12, 1990, and it “revived the tradition of the Baltic Entente of 1934.”¹⁵¹ The council is led by a rotating chairman, and on July 2, 1996, Estonia assumed chairmanship. Upon assuming this role, the Estonian foreign minister declared that Baltic cooperation is a major factor in determining the speed of integration into the European Union and NATO. He stated that his focus would be to “develop the security of the region and the economic status, which would enable the Baltic States to integrate closer with Europe.”¹⁵²

The foreign minister suggested three programs to focus upon. The first was the internationalism of the Via Baltica (a highway running through the Baltic States

¹⁴⁹ Lieven, page 76

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pages 76-77

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, page 77

providing an effective land link from the Gulf of Finland to Central Europe). This has already begun with the building of Finnish gas stations at many of the highway's rest-stops. In 1997, the American fast food chain McDonalds will begin building restaurants co-located with these service stations.¹⁵³

The second area was to develop a customs union among the Baltic States. This topic was addressed at a meeting of President Meri from Estonia and President Ulmanis from Latvia, on October 24, 1996. The two main issues discussed were cooperation in the integration process with European and North Atlantic structures and the development of a customs union among the Baltic States. Free trade became a reality in October, as the Latvian parliament (the last of the three) ratified free trade agreements among the nations.¹⁵⁴

The final area of cooperation suggested by the foreign minister was the promotion of foreign investment.¹⁵⁵ To date, the Baltic States have been very successful in this area. One explanation for this is the tremendous public relations campaign being executed by each of the Baltic States. Foreign companies have chosen to invest in the Baltics because of the favorable investment environment, which the governments have assured by maintaining liberal trade policies, following solid monetary policy and executing tax

¹⁵² Estonian Review, July 1-7, 1996, "Estonia pledges further Baltic cooperation as Chairman"

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

programs that are western in style.¹⁵⁶ Much of this cooperation and strategic planning is done through the Baltic Council of Ministers.

On March 5, 1992, in Copenhagen, the final organization of Nordic-Baltic cooperation was established. This is the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and it is the only organization which crosses the divide between the Nordic and Baltic Sea states, and as such, is the primary forum for coordinated activity among these nations. The members are the overlapping combination of the five Nordic countries (including the three autonomous regions of the Faröe Islands, the Åland Islands, and Greenland) and the nine Baltic Sea states. Representation is made at the foreign ministerial level, and the CBSS chairmanship rotates annually. So far, this chairmanship has been held by: Finland, Estonia, Poland, Sweden, and currently by Latvia.

On July 3, 1996, the CBSS foreign ministers met at Kalmar, Sweden, to produce a program outlining regional efforts through the year 2000.¹⁵⁷ The broad range of subjects discussed at this conference clearly shows the breadth of regional cooperation. Among other things, the participants pledged to continue their fight against international crime and smuggling using programs that link customs, border guards, police, coast guards, and rescue services of the region.¹⁵⁸

The summit also discussed economic issues. The final document released called for the European Union to accept Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to “stimulate trade and investments in the entire region.” The statement also called for the ratification

¹⁵⁶ Based on information provided by the United States Embassy in Tallinn, Estonia, encouraging American businesses to establish operations in the Baltics

of a “cooperative agreement between EU and Russia.” Members of the CBSS expect the proposals to be considered seriously within EU since four CBSS members are also members of the European Union (Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland).¹⁵⁹

Other issues discussed included regional security (with most nations agreeing that the Baltic States should be given special consideration when European security structures are enlarged), the Via Baltica highway project, the “environmental integrity” of regional lakes and rivers and the “ecological health” of the Baltic Sea. At the conclusion of the summit, Sweden turned chairmanship of the council over to Latvia.

As the nations of the Baltic Sea region continue to develop, as economies continue to expand, as western institutions begin to enlarge, and as a result of the economic and environmental interdependence of the Baltic region, organizations such as the Nordic and Baltic Councils of Ministers, and the Council of Baltic Sea States are not only desirable, but vital. They will play crucial roles in the successful development of the region as it enters the 21st century. Estonia has taken its place in these regional organizations with pride and confidence. Their next step is to continue their efforts to enter the main Western organizations of the EU, WEU, and NATO, and to continue to court the Nordic nations for their support.

¹⁵⁷ Estonian Review, July 1-7, 1996 “Cooperation growing for Baltic Sea States”

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

B. IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Estonia on its part continues the policy of positive engagement towards Russia, the objective of which is to lower the political rhetoric in order to create a more constructive atmosphere to chart bilateral questions and their solutions, avoiding progress-inhibiting approaches¹⁶⁰

Estonia realizes that Russia is vital to its survival and that their continued independence depends both on relations with that country and support from the West. However, Estonia often finds itself of having to walk a tightrope between relying on Western nations and organizations for their support and standing up for themselves as an independent and fully sovereign state. At an address given to the Riigikogu on December 5, 1996, the Foreign Minister described this dilemma by stating that:

Estonia must relate to Russia as a normal Western state, free and confident of its independence and not as a former colony or oblast burdened by complexes and doubts - assuming the latter role would but ferment uncertainty and doubts not only in the east but also in the west and at home in Estonia.

As has previously been alluded to, one of the most contentious issues in Russian-Estonian relations is the allegation of human rights abuses of the ethnic Russian and Russian speaking minorities in Estonia. The essence of this debate is Estonia's treatment of these non-Estonians and their descendants who settled in the country following the Soviet annexation.

The Russification efforts of the Soviet Union had increased the Russian speaking population in Estonia from eight percent before 1940 to 38 percent by the end of the Cold

War,¹⁶¹ and Estonia claims that only residents of pre-war (independent) Estonia have the automatic right to citizenship. The Russians argue that non-Estonians who had Soviet citizenship should automatically have that citizenship transferred to Estonian if they desire, as has been the case in most of the countries of the former Soviet Union.

As a direct result of this dispute, there have been a large number of high-level missions and fact-finding delegations conducted by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Among these was a mission sent to Estonia by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE now called OSCE) in February 1993. The purpose of this mission was to seek ways to bring the Estonian and Russian communities together. Prior to this, the CSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights visited Estonia in December 1992, and the CSCE High Commissioner for Ethnic Minorities made several trips to Estonia during the first half on 1993. From February 7-11, 1993, a U.N. fact-finding mission led by Mr. Ibrahim Fall, the Director of the U.N. Center for Human Rights, visited Estonia, and the Council of Europe sent delegations in April 1992 and March 1993.¹⁶²

The Estonian government has stated that the “continued integration of non-citizens into Estonian society” is one of the “government’s domestic priorities.”¹⁶³ To facilitate this, the Estonian parliament passed a series of laws affecting the non-Estonian population in the years following its regained independence. In 1992, Estonia passed its Law on

¹⁶⁰ Press statement made by Foreign Minister Toomas Hendrik Ilves on February 19, 1997

¹⁶¹ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, January 17, 1997. Today, 35.4 percent of the population is non-Estonian. These minorities are comprised of 21 different nationalities, and Russians form the largest group at 28.5 percent of the total population.

¹⁶² This information is compiled from the “Human Rights and Democratization in Estonia” report prepared by the Staff of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and published in Washington DC. in September 1993 and does not include missions after that date.

Citizenship, which both the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe helped to prepare. This law is partially based on the citizenship law of 1938 and (as the Estonian government routinely points out) is *not* based on ethnicity.

In spite of Russia's desire for automatic citizenship, this is not given by the citizenship law. Instead, the 1992 law "restored citizenship to all those individuals who were Estonian citizens before 1940, and their descendants;"¹⁶⁴ however, an important element of this law is that every individual has the right to acquire citizenship by naturalization.

The naturalization process requires five years of residency and a language competence at a minimum conversational level. The language requirement was one of the most controversial elements of this law, especially considering that until the 1989, the official language of Estonia had been Russian. Recently, the language test was rewritten, standardizing it based on recommendations and advice from European experts. Before taking the test, applicants may take a pre-test free of charge, and during 1995, of the 4,000 people that took the actual test, 82.5 percent passed.¹⁶⁵ As of January 1997, the government had issued 966,413 citizen's passports, 89,973 non-Estonians had been given citizenship through naturalization, and another approximate 80,000 non-Estonians already hold Estonian citizenship by birth.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, February 4, 1997.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, January 17, 1997

¹⁶⁶ Estonia Today, "Citizenship statistics: an update as of March 1997," April 8, 1997

Another important law passed by the Riigikogu was the Law on Aliens. This law declares that all aliens in Estonia shall be guaranteed rights and liberties equal to those of Estonian citizens. Non-citizens wishing to live in Estonia can apply for residency permits, and as of January 1, 1997, the government had issued 335,368 of these.¹⁶⁷ Some have expressed concerns that non-Estonian citizens who are not citizens of another country may be prohibited from traveling because of the lack of a recognized passport. To solve this problem, the Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board offers an Estonian alien's passport. As of March 1997, the board had received 140,049 alien passport applications, and all but approximately 4,000 had been issued.¹⁶⁸

One of the most unique aspects of the Law on Aliens is that it permits non-citizens to participate in local elections. Estonia is one of the few countries that allows aliens to participate in the political process. The Estonian government states that since "local governments are the main providers of basic services... this right allows non-citizens active participation in the process of governing. This law highlights the government's commitment in supporting people's freedom of choice in citizenship."¹⁶⁹ Another area in which Estonia breaks ground uncommon in other countries is its Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities, which is based upon their 1925 law of the same name. This law provides national minorities with "state support for schooling and churches in their mother tongue."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Estonia Today, "Citizenship statistics: an update as of March 1997," April 8, 1997

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, January 17, 1997

Despite Russia's constant claims they are speaking on behalf of the non-Estonians who are being "discriminated" against, and who are having their human rights "abused," it is becoming increasingly apparent that this is not true. In September 1993, the University of Strathclyde conducted a survey of attitudes and opinions in Estonia and the other Baltic States. This survey, entitled "Studies in Public Policy No. 222, Nationalities in the Baltic States," was conducted by Richard Rose and William Maley and funded by the European Community's Copernicus program for Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST). The results of the survey clearly show that Russia's concerns for the non-Estonians are not shared by those individuals.

When Russians in Estonia were asked to describe their relations with Estonians, 74 percent said that they were either "good" or "very good." Russians in Estonia said they disagreed with the statement that they were "being badly treated here" (58 percent) and another 11 percent said they "didn't know." Just short of 60 percent of the Russians agreed that they should "be made to learn" Estonian, and 64 percent believed that Estonia offered "better chances for improving living standards in the future than does Russia" (21 percent were undecided).

These numbers would support the argument that non-Estonians are not unhappy with their conditions in Estonia. In fact, in the January 1995 issue of *The World Today*, a journal produced by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Dr. William Maley wrote an article entitled "Does Russia speak for the Baltic Russians?" His answer to that question is clearly, no. He states "these data show clearly that the more extreme among those who act as spokesmen of Russian and Baltic Russian opinion fail in significant

respects to represent the majority views of the communities for which they speak.” Dr. Maley points out that Russians in Estonia clearly prefer the Estonian government over that in Russia. When he asked Russian-Estonians to rate the governments, these were his results:

	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Estonian</i>
<i>Positive</i>	27%	50%
<i>Neutral</i>	9%	13%
<i>Negative</i>	62%	37%

Another revelation from Dr. Maley was that, not only were the Russian claims for concern over Russian-Estonians unfounded, but their claim that they spoke for all Russians was equally false. The survey showed that “only 39 percent of Russians in Russia thought that there should be close ties between Russia and Estonia. This compares with 89 percent for Belarus, 87 for Ukraine, 74 for Kazakhstan, and 64 for Moldova.”¹⁷¹

Because it is true that statistics can often be used to support either side of an argument, it is interesting to see what surveys conducted by the Russians themselves say. On April 13, 1995, Emil Pain, an advisor to Boris Yeltsin, released a study he had conducted in December the year before. The results show the Russian concerns for minorities in Estonia are unfounded. His report concluded that when surveyed, 66 percent of Russian-Estonians responded that they did not want to see the Soviet Union restored, 75 percent did not want to see Estonia subjugated to Moscow, 93 percent planned to stay in Estonia, and 53 percent intended to become Estonian citizens. Even though the Russian

government has repeatedly claimed that minorities are being mistreated, 87 percent responded that they had never had any problems with the local population.

Perhaps more significant than the results of surveys are the result of the fact-finding missions and delegations. The United States Department of State publishes an annual report on Human Rights Practices, and in March of 1995, this report found that:

In the context of repeated Russian allegations of violations of the human rights of the non-citizen population, both the OSCE mission in Estonia and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities have declared that they could find no pattern of human rights violations or abuses in Estonia.

Additionally, in January 1997, the “Council of Europe voted to finish its monitoring efforts in Estonia, citing the successful realization of all of its goals.”¹⁷² That same month, Max van der Stoep, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, stated that since the beginning of his work in 1993, he has found absolutely “no evidence of systematic persecution of national minorities or of a systematic violation of human rights in Estonia.”¹⁷³

While the Estonian government contends that their goal is an “Estonia for all Estonians, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity,”¹⁷⁴ they continue to hear accusations to the contrary. Based on the results of investigations by the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the United States State Department, and the United Nations, Foreign Minister Ilves declares “one can only conclude that those accusations constitute classical disinformation as we knew in the Soviet era.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Reflection of Estonia Number 8, April 26, 1995

¹⁷² Toomas Hendrik Ilves, February 4, 1997

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

What more can Estonia do at this point? They have already opened their country to examination by every significant regional and international organization. These organizations have concluded that the accusations of abuses are false. It is important for the Western nations to understand this, and not to allow Russian disinformation to influence important decisions such as the enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance or the European Union. At the same time, it is important that Estonia continue its efforts to resolve disputes with Russia. One of these issues continues to be an agreement on the border between the two countries. Another is the refusal of Russia to allow the admission of the Baltic States into NATO. While the first issue can and should be resolved internally, the second will no doubt involve the full diplomatic effort of the Western nations to achieve.

It now appears however, that the border dispute may be very close to a settlement. On November 5, 1996, the Russian and Estonian Foreign Ministers met in the Russian city of Petrozavodsk and reached an agreement. Mainly because Estonia views the unsettled border issues as a hindrance to EU membership, they made most of the compromises. Estonia agreed to “no longer demand that the border agreement between the two countries specifically mention the continued validity of the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty.”¹⁷⁶ This is important because it was this treaty in which Russia renounced “voluntarily and forever all rights of sovereignty over the Estonian people and territory.”¹⁷⁷ The other important compromise was that “there would not be any major border revisions and that

¹⁷⁶ Girnius, November 8, 1996

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

Russia would retain the 2,300 km² of land that had belonged to Estonia in 1918-1940, but it had incorporated from 1944 to 1954.”¹⁷⁸

Unfortunately, these agreements broke down at the beginning of 1997. Russia appears to be using the border agreement as leverage for other concessions from Estonia (possibly to encourage Estonia to back down from seeking NATO membership). On January 9, 1997, Estonian Foreign Minister Ilves stated

It is regrettable and incomprehensible for the Russian Foreign Minister to refuse to sign a border treaty with which he himself agreed two months ago, especially considering that it places the border where Russia itself fixed it more than two years ago by a unilateral decree...such an attitude towards the practice of concluding international treaties is strange, to say it mildly...Estonia is prepared to sign the border agreement and expects that Russia too will find sufficient will to take this consequent step in the construction of an all-European security architecture for the 21st century¹⁷⁹

As long as relations with a neighbor as large and potentially threatening as Russia remain poor, the survival of the state of Estonia remains in question. The armed forces of Russia today are only slightly smaller than the total population of Estonia; however, the demonstrated willingness of Western nations to protect Estonia's sovereignty, the capability of the Estonians to provide for their own defense, and an honest effort to improve relations through bilateral and multilateral diplomacy can reduce the likelihood that Estonia will be endangered.

¹⁷⁸ Girnius, November 8, 1996

¹⁷⁹ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, January 9, 1997

VIII. CONCLUSION

Unlike other nations of the former Soviet Union, independence came to Estonia as the realization of national longings. Many of these states achieved their new sovereign status almost by accident, and in some cases, only modestly desired such a state and did not seem to know what to do with their new freedoms. This circumstance was not true for Estonia. Their national history going back over 750 years had prepared them for the time when their independence would come, and when the opportunity arose, the Estonian people acted with decisiveness and solidarity.

In 1997, such decisiveness continues as Estonia forcefully courts membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. How well Estonia succeeds in imbedding itself into these organizations will directly affect its national security over the next few decades. The prospect of being excluded seems unimaginable to Estonians. Estonia must continue to enrich and consolidate its relations with its other Baltic neighbors and the Europeans, for it is through these relations that Estonia can achieve economic strength and enhance security.

As NATO decides which nations will be invited to accede at the Madrid Summit in July 1997, the people of Estonia will continue to hope for subsequent rounds of enlargement. On May 29, 1997, two days after the signing of the Founding Act, U.S. Secretary of State Albright reaffirmed that "the first new members will not be the last."¹⁸⁰ This policy is exactly the hope of Estonia.

¹⁸⁰ Ames, May 29, 1997

The decision of whether to support Estonian membership in NATO or not has several implications for U.S. policy. The large constituencies of Baltic immigrants in the United States will continue to press Congress to support Estonian membership. At the same time, such a decision would further the goals of the U.S. to erase the artificial dividing lines that the victors unjustly imposed on Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. Unfortunately, the decision is not that simple. Russia still maintains that the admission of former Soviet republics into NATO is unacceptable.

If the United States government decides to support NATO membership for Estonia or the other Baltic States, this step must be done with the full understanding of how it will affect relations with Russia. However, with the signing of the Founding Act in May 1997, Russia has displayed some flexibility towards the issue of NATO enlargement. Possibly, as time progresses, Russia's stance on Baltic admission will soften also.

The answers to these issues have yet to emerge, but certainly Estonia has accomplished much in its first six years. Domestically, it has built a state based on rule of law and have held free and democratic elections at both the local and national level. They have developed the "legal and economic institutions that form the foundation of democratic and market economy states,"¹⁸¹ and economically they have developed a stable currency, a balanced budget, and low unemployment.

Internationally, they have taken their place in the Nordic and Baltic communities, as well as in European organizations such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE. They have begun the application process to join the EU and have signed the Europe Agreements. Participation in Partnership for Peace is their first step on the road to NATO

membership, and they have created a combined peace-keeping battalion which has successfully participated in operations in Bosnia and Lebanon.

Observers of European security must give Estonia its due. Estonia has achieved a lot, and can offer a lot, not only within NATO, but to the community of European nations. Hostilities with Russia (politically or militarily) are not likely to seriously threaten Estonia's existence for the foreseeable future, based on the amount of integration with the West it has achieved, and the amount of support it could expect to receive. This time, Estonia is here to stay.

¹⁸¹ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, January 9, 1997

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